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BLACKS IN THE NEWSROOM



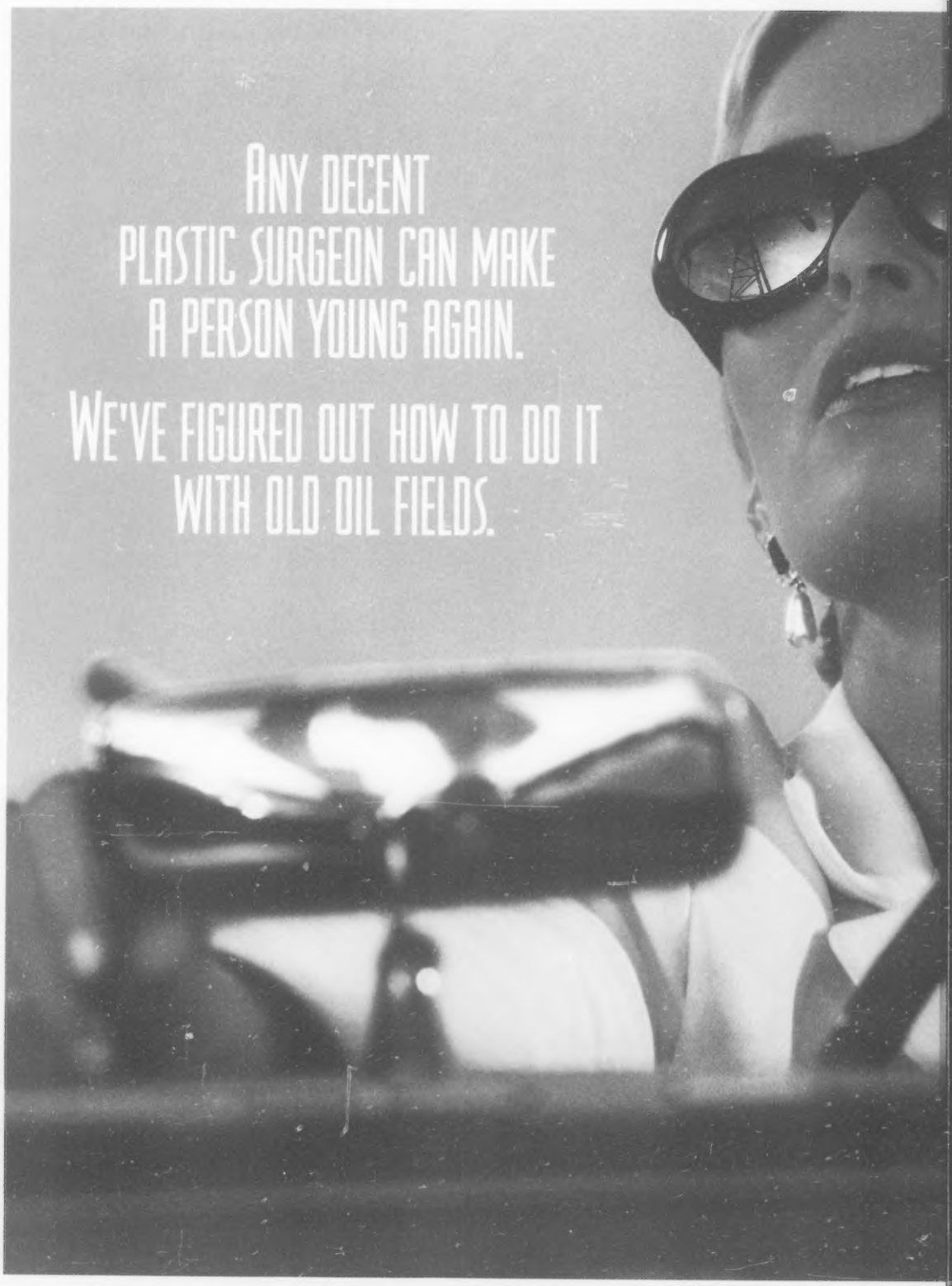


Progress? Yes, but ...

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MAY/JUNE 1998

"TO ASSESS THE PERFORMANCE OF JOURNALISM . . . TO HELP STIMULATE CONTINUING IMPROVEMENT IN THE PROFESSION, AND TO SPEAK OUT FOR WHAT IS RIGHT, FAIR, AND DECENT"

From the founding editorial, 1961

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Publisher's Note

by Joan Konner

Fred Friendly
1915-1998

If this tribute were on videotape, instead of in print, it would go something like this:

Clip: Fred Friendly: "Our job is not to make up anybody's mind but to make the agony of decision-making so intense you can only escape by thinking."

Clip: Fred Friendly quoting Walter Lippmann: "The purpose of journalism is to give information on which the citizen can act."

Clip: A cartoon with the caption: "*I'd* know. That's who'd know."

If this were television, you'd not have to say much more to capture the spirit and vision of Fred Friendly.



GABRIEL AMADEUS COONEY

The first clip would have come from his final and lasting television triumph, *The Columbia Media and Society Seminars*. Their energizing principle was to force the participants — who included not only the players but the viewing audience — to think for themselves about the most difficult issues of the day. Fred borrowed the technique of the Socratic dialogue from Plato and adapted it to introduce the nation to the political, social, and legal dilemmas of today's world.

The second clip would have come from Fred's classroom in the Columbia Graduate School of Journalism, where he taught students to recognize and to aspire to the highest of ideals of the industry; to pursue responsible and knowledgeable journalism that works to create an informed public on which a democracy depends; and to practice journalism as a public service and public trust, as he did throughout his life.

Fred was professional godfather to a generation of some of the best journalists of our times. His progeny lead and work for all the major news organizations and smaller institutions serving their communities. Among the Friendly alumni/ae are: Tom Bettag, executive producer, ABC News *Nightline*; Mark Harrington, vice president and general manager of MSNBC; Steve Kroft, CBS *60 Minutes* correspondent; Jonathan Landman, editor of *The New York Times* News of the Week in Review; Cynthia McFadden, ABC News correspondent; Richard M. Smith, chairman and editor-in-chief of *Newsweek*. Geraldo Rivera is an alumnus of the summer fellowship program for minority journalists that operated under Fred's aegis, as is Charlayne Hunter-Gault.

The third clip would be that of the *New Yorker* cartoon that hangs on a wall in the Friendly home. It shows a man and a woman stranded on a desert island. They could do anything without anyone else ever finding out — anyone, that is, except themselves. The caption reads: "*I'd* know, that's who'd know." Translated: You would know, that's who would know. The individual, alone, is responsible for his or her actions and is the final judge of them.

Fred Friendly made some tough judgments, some agonizing decisions. He resigned as president of CBS News when he believed it made the wrong moral choice in showing a rerun of *I Love Lucy* instead of a hearing of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee on Vietnam. He joined the Ford Foundation as an adviser on communications and supported, through public television, some of the most creative and substantive programming ever to appear on TV. He came to the Columbia Graduate School of Journalism in 1966 as an Edward R. Murrow Professor of Journalism, and he inspired a generation of journalists. In his so-called retirement from Ford and from the school, he continued to produce his media and society seminars, and inspired a nation.

Fred Friendly, explaining his decisions, used to bellow: "I know who I am." Fred knows, that's who knows. That was a challenge to every student, colleague, and journalist. Do you know who you are? Do you know what ideals or masters you serve? Does your work express what you believe? Do you know what you stand for? For what principle would you quit your job?

There were no double standards for Fred Friendly and no compromise in his choices, his relationships, even his conversation. Here stood an indelible presence — a man of character, of integrity, of ideals. As a journalist and a mega-television producer, Fred Friendly signalized events and explained our times. As a teacher, he seeded his industry with talent, ideas, and the highest standards. As a de facto, honorary lawyer, he showed more respect for, and knowledge of, the Constitution than many lawyers. Another of his sayings was: "Just because you have the right doesn't mean it is the right thing to do." That goes for citizens, journalists, special prosecutors, and presidents.

Those of us in Fred Friendly's orbit and millions more in his audience had our minds held to the fire, the fire that raged in Fred's own mind. If there is a Heaven, its proprietor better watch out. If it isn't true to its word, Fred Friendly might just defect and create a better one. ◆

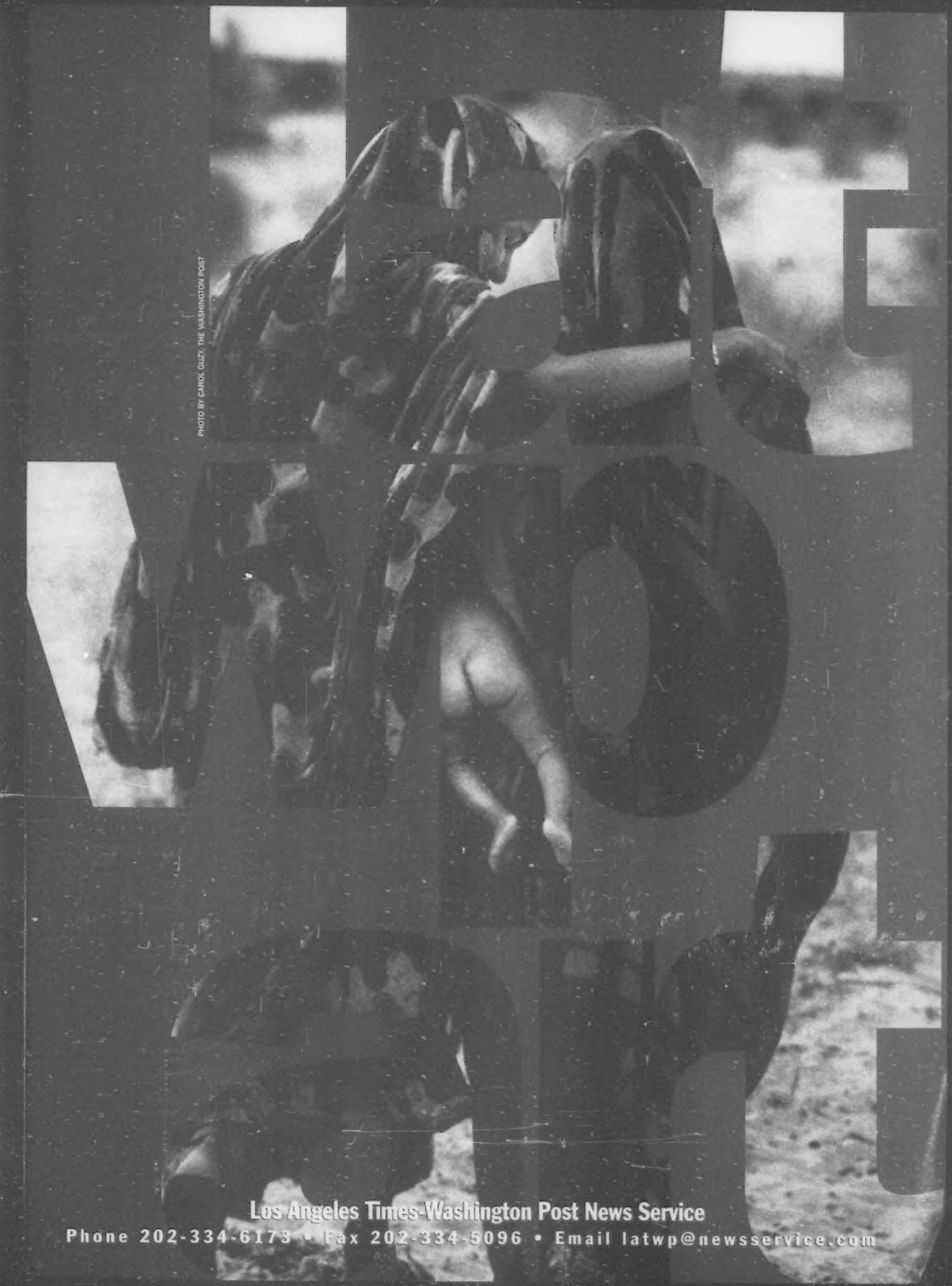


PHOTO BY CAROL GUZY, THE WASHINGTON POST

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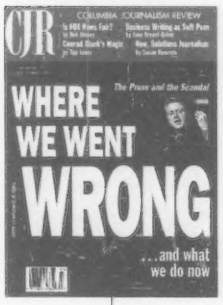
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Letters

THE SCANDAL



No wonder the press ranks right up there with used car salesmen in the trustworthiness department. Whether or not the president is having sex with his staff is nobody's business but his and his wife's (and, of course, the third party).

What concerns me more is the way the "news" is gathered ("Where We Went Wrong," CJR, March/April). As a reporter/editor for a small-town weekly, I could never get away with that type of reporting. That is not to say that a good deal of information doesn't come to me by way of "anonymous sources" or "off-the-record" comments; however, I do not report it unless I can confirm it by other means. Most of the time, I can. That, unfortunately, takes time and work. Reporting whatever someone tells you, without verification, does not.

SHAWN M. UNDERWOOD
Managing editor, *The Island Gazette*
Carolina Beach, North Carolina

Congratulations to Jules Witcover, one of the most civilized journalists of our generation, for citing the shamelessness of reporters and news organizations that have been out of control. As a longtime journalist outside the Washington loop, I have watched from a safe distance as one media renegade after another recklessly purported to reveal the sexiest secrets of the Clinton presidency without regard to the fallout.

Out here in the boonies, we have to wonder whether the media stars take themselves so seriously in the blinding gloss of their business that they consider themselves above whatever damage they cause to the integrity of our profession. So now we will sit around with pensive expressions, searching for remedies for an institution gone haywire. But insofar as public confidence is concerned, it may already be too late.

ABE ZAIDAN
Former senior editor
Akron Beacon Journal
Cuyahoga Falls, Ohio

I found the "What We Do Now" article in the March/April issue to be vastly entertaining. I'm sure the high-level editors and press observers you spoke to were sincere in their lists of dos and don'ts for covering the next big scandal. But let's get real: the next time a big story rolls around, their suggestions will mean zilch to the reporters, editors, and producers in the trenches covering it. They know their first obligation will be to get something, anything, on the air or Web or into print as soon as possible, because if they don't, someone else will.

Can you picture a reporter saying to her editor, "I don't care what Matt Drudge is reporting! Marvin Kalb says we shouldn't run it until we have independent confirmation from two sources, so let's wait"? Neither can I.

The reason we have a First Amendment is because the Founding Fathers assumed that while the press will always indulge in half-truths, rumors, and misinformation, with enough competing voices, something approaching the truth will eventually emerge.

JEFFREY BENDIX
Director of Media Relations
Case Western Reserve University
Cleveland Heights, Ohio

I recommend that all television reporters be wired to a polygraph and be asked details about their own personal lives — whether, for example, they cheated at school, at home, and on the job (newspaper reporters would only have to sign an affidavit).

I would like the regular contributors like the lawyers whose title says something like "constitutional law scholar" to be really identified: "conservative freak who will on pain of death say nothing good about the president"; "Michigan militiaman posing as lawyer"; that kind of thing. Oh, and their identification should include a line telling how much they're being paid for the appearance.

FYI, I spent more than twenty years as a reporter with the *Philadelphia*

CJR

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Evening Bulletin, the *Atlantic City Press*, and a handful of other papers on the west and east coasts before going into government and academia.

RON TEUNIS
Hudson, Florida

Anyone out there interested in starting a new periodical on the hottest thing in journalism today?

We are going to call it "Rumors!"

LOU J. KUSTAS
Former reporter, *Buffalo Evening News*
Poughkeepsie, New York

REGULAR NEWS

Re the January/February Dart suggesting that a *Chicago Tribune* marketing arrangement with Starbucks was related to a *Tribune* profile of Starbucks c.e.o. Howard Schultz:

No one on the *Tribune*'s editorial staff, including those who assigned, wrote, or edited the story, had any connection to the marketing initiative to sell the *Chicago Tribune* at Chicago-area Starbucks. Howard Schultz is a legitimate subject for a profile, as evidenced by ample coverage of him elsewhere. It's also clear that Starbucks has been highly successful. Anyone who believes the story was "a not-so-curious coincidence" is sipping something a lot stronger than coffee.

SCOTT C. SMITH
President and publisher
Chicago Tribune
Chicago, Illinois

MISSPOKEN EDITOR

In the article, "It's Not Just in L.A." (CJR, January/February), I was taken aback by managing editor Steve Knickmeyer's remark that most of the sixty newsroom employees laid off by *The Arizona Republic* in January 1997 were "fat, lazy, incompetent, and slow." What was most appalling about his gross generalization was its utter inaccuracy.

I worked at Phoenix Newspapers Inc. for ten years and was the feature editor during the time of the layoffs. Most of the people who were fired were longtime colleagues. Many of them were highly regarded professionals with drawers full of awards and front-page stories to their credit. Some of them had just received outstanding performance evaluations.

To receive a severance package, they were required to sign a document stating that the loss of their job was due to a "reduction in force" and that it was unrelated to job performance. Knickmeyer's statement was a curiously public contradiction of that.

Apparently, *The Arizona Republic*'s management and legal department were also disturbed by that contradiction. He resigned soon after newsroom employees became aware of the article, and after his departure, the *Republic* published a disavowal of his remarks.

MAREN S. BINGHAM
Sunday editor, *Sun-Sentinel*
Ft. Lauderdale, Florida

WHO'S UNFAIR?

How Neil Hickey, in his piece "Is Fox News Fair?" (CJR, March/April), can see the evidence before him and totally ignore it is beyond me. He quotes Sean Hannity as an example of the network's "right-of-center sensibility" while neglecting to mention liberal co-host Alan Colmes — hence the program's name *Hannity & Colmes*. He makes much of Catherine Crier's past as a Republican judge yet is unable to cite even one example of any bias on her part. Brit Hume is quoted as saying that "FNC does not 'pander to the right,'" yet Hickey somehow concludes the opposite by claiming this is an example of "defending FNC's ideological tone." *The Washington Post*'s Juan Williams, a

CJR

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JOHNS HOPKINS
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In Washington, Pew Fellows will spend two months in seminars with specialists in international affairs at SAIS. Following that study period, Fellows will travel abroad on individual five-week programs to do work on an important international topic or story of their choice. Fellows will return to SAIS for a final two-week period in which they will be expected to complete a project report on their findings.

Each year two groups of seven journalists will be selected for the program. One group of Fellows will participate in a program from early September through mid-December. A second group of Fellows will take part in a program from late January through mid-May. Fellowships are available to U.S. journalists in either print or broadcast media with at least three years' professional experience. Pew Fellows will receive free accommodation in Washington, free tuition at SAIS, a monthly stipend of $2,000 and expenses for international travel.

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staunch defender of affirmative action, the welfare state, and every social program known to man, is described as being "from the putative center."

At least Fox News Channel puts the word "opinion" on the screen when it may not be clear that one of its chat hosts is opining. The other networks have never done this and never will, because they lack the ability to tell the difference and the courage to admit it.

DAVID ZINKIN
Independent corporate consultant
Rochester, New York

BOUGHT AND PAID FOR

Walter Guzzardi's logic ("Waking Up From a Dream Job," CJR March/April) suggests a disconnect from the real world.

Guzzardi's relationship to the American International Group was that of a painter to a wealthy patron commissioning a portrait. As it has been since the time of the Medicis, the job is basically ego indulgence in exchange for money. I'm sure $100,000 a year for two years was only an incidental consideration, that Guzzardi's motivation to write the book was really the fascinating human drama of a man of vision selling insurance to the Chinese in 1919.

Now we have the "artist" grousing that the patron has chosen to store his completed work in the closet for a while because it didn't match the color of the new furniture in the living room.

Certainly no one enjoys putting two years of his or her life into a project that never sees the light of day. But the client did not refuse to pay him; in fact, I believe $200,000 sets a Guinness record for a kill fee.

In short, AIG treats its free-lancers better than most news organizations. It never was journalism, Walter. Grow up.

NIELS ERICH
Consultant, Clear Channel Communications Corp.
San Francisco, California

NO PUFF PIECE

Your Dart (March/April) aimed at our spread on the opening of a grocer's superstore in Waco conveyed a false impression of our paper. We did the story because the store, opened by a grocery chain that already dominates the local market, would have a major impact on the lives of thousands of our readers. In other words, news.

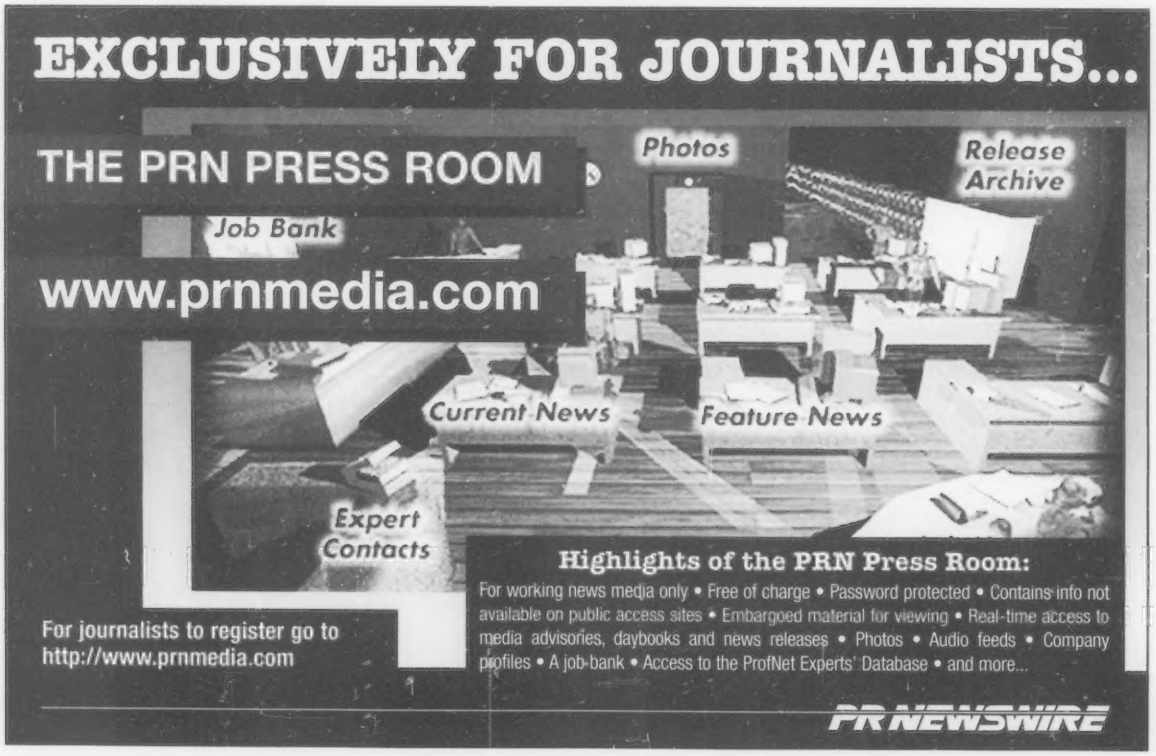
It was not a puff piece sucking up to an advertiser. It explored the impact on consumers and competitors, and its depiction of company history and strategies included both praise and criticisms.

BOB LOTT
Editor, *Waco Tribune-Herald*
Waco, Texas

FIGHTING BACK

Let me second Mike McGraw's letter (CJR, March/April) on making the Freedom of Information Act work. I suggest one further, more difficult step: newspeople should cover every incident of official stonewalling, whether involving a reporter's efforts at getting information or the efforts of citizens denied information or action by officials who fail to respond. And then print or air the situation, no matter how trivial. A guarantee of exposure is the only fear political hacks have.

The situation should be covered as any news story should be, with comment from the offended party — be that



the editor or publisher or the citizen in the street — and from the uncooperative official, even a "no comment" or "get the hell out of my office."

WILSON L. BARTO SR.
Immediate past Chair, Project Sunshine
Society of Professional Journalists
Skippack, New Jersey

BLACKENED PICTURE

I am the editor of a daily newspaper owned by American Publishing Company, a subsidiary of Conrad Black's Hollinger International. From all I have witnessed since American purchased this community daily in 1995, I feel that Tim Jones's article on Black ("That Old Black Magic," CJR, March/April) presented an incomplete and thus unfair picture.

While the story painted Black as a swashbuckling corporate egoist with no regard for editorial training or professional development, I have found just the opposite to be true. American has been exceedingly concerned with editorial quality and training. For example, last year, our paper spearheaded regional editorial seminars in Texas and Florida as well as three national conferences devoted solely to editorial enhancement on American newspapers. Of course, I don't keep up with what is happening with Canadian newspapers owned by Hollinger. But I can tell you that in Northwest Arkansas this newspaper teems with relevant local news coverage, much of it groundbreaking, even cutting edge (see CJR Laurel, January/February).

The overall face of our newspaper industry has changed dramatically and the high profit margins mentioned by Jones are demanded by every publicly held newspaper group. Hollinger and American are certainly no different in that respect from Gannett, Cox, Donrey, Thomson, or now, even Knight-Ridder.

We all know the majority of large and small U.S. dailies today have openly embraced what I call amusement journalism, the soft, entertainment-slanted, stenographic non-news of which Jones writes, and which, I also assume in the interest of fairness, is no fault whatsoever of Conrad Black's.

MIKE MASTERSON
Editor, *Northwest Arkansas Times*
Fayetteville, Arkansas

CORRECTION

A story in the January/February issue by Trudy Lieberman, titled "Gimme! — Freebies for Newsfolk in the World of High-Tech," raised questions about whether Rich Warren, a free-lance writer who has written about consumer electronics for the *Chicago Tribune*, keeps some of the equipment he reviews, notably a WebTV unit from Sony and a home theater speaker system from Polk Audio. In a letter, Warren says that he either returns or buys all equipment sent to him for review. Officials from Sony and Polk Audio confirm that this was the case with the two items in question. The editors regret suggesting otherwise.

Warren also says that Lieberman did not "confront me with the accusations made in her article" before it ran. However, Lieberman told Warren the subject of the article and asked him for an interview about his own policy. Warren refused and terminated the conversation.

EDITORS' NOTE

In our March/April issue, CJR should have noted that Gerry McCarthy, a writer based in Lindsay, Ontario, contributed to the reporting for Tim Jones's story on Conrad Black.



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REPORTING

PUSHED OFF THE PRESS PLANE

There were plenty of reasons for news organizations to travel with President Clinton on his twelve-day journey to Africa. It was the longest foreign trip of his presidency. It was the first time a sitting U.S. president had visited South Africa. It was an opportunity to shed light on the continent's under-covered economic progress.

But balanced against all of those pluses was one big four-letter minus: cost. One Washington bureau chief estimates that when the bills are added up, the trip would cost his newspaper some $26,000 per correspondent, and for some organizations that is just too steep. Roughly 220 journalists joined the president for his African tour. Not bad, but fewer than one might expect, and below the 260 who traveled with President Reagan on his jaunt to Helsinki, Moscow, and London in 1988.



AP WIDE WORLD / GREG GIBSON

President Clinton meets the press in Dakar, Senegal

The Africa journey is just the latest example of how high travel costs are pushing news outlets out of foreign presidential coverage. Consider some of the casualties. The Baltimore *Sun*, *Chicago Sun-Times*, Cox Newspapers, Scripps Howard News Service, Hearst Newspapers, and McClatchy Newspapers, which all sent at least one reporter with Reagan in 1988, sent none to Africa. "It just wasn't worth it," says Leo Rennert, senior Washington correspondent for McClatchy. "We've had to become more judicious with our travel budget."

Several factors inflate costs. One is the 1991 bankruptcy of Pan Am Airlines. Pan Am, which used to handle all presidential press charters, was willing to suck up a lot of the expense connected with them without passing it on. For example, the press plane that accompanies Air Force One sits idle for long periods during a presidential trip, earning nothing as it waits. Since Pan Am's bankruptcy, other airlines have been making news organizations eat such costs. "No other airline thought the prestige was worth losses," says George D. Condon, Jr. of Copley News Service.

A perceived lack of reader interest in foreign policy also helps raise the price of the ticket. Because the trips are charters, the number of reporters who sign up directly affects the per-reporter cost. The consequence is a vicious circle: fewer reporters means a higher cost, forcing more reporters off the plane, which again increases costs, and so on.

Another factor in the reduced number of travelers is network cutbacks, says Marlin Fitzwater, the press secretary for the Bush and Reagan administrations, now retired from public service. In the past, the network camera crews, along with back-up crews, were on the press charter. As budgets tightened, Fitzwater says, the networks began sending only a reporter, who would meet a local crew at the scene.

One result of the changes, particularly for print organizations, is that presidential travel coverage increasingly is left in the hands of local bureau reporters or stringers. Some Washington editors worry that these people may miss presidential nuances. "They are fine on the public stuff," but they can miss the subtext, says Carl Leubsdorf, *Dallas Morning News* Washington bureau chief. Also, he adds, the bureau reporters and stringers "don't know the White House staff," which can make it harder to get questions answered and context explained.

But organizations that skip presidential trips risk something more serious than a missed story or two: marginalization. Leubsdorf says that in Washington, a city where the appearance of being a player is critical to gaining the confidence of big-league sources, skipping presidential travel can connote "second-tier" status, making it tougher to pry out information.

Copley's Condon says Clinton's travel itinerary this year — including a trip to Santiago, Chile, in April and two trips to Asia, probably in late June and the fall — is going to hurt coverage even though the news service is planning to go wherever the President goes. The news service normally sends two reporters to the annual G-7 economic summit in May, but this year it will dispatch only one to what is now the G-8, in Birmingham, England — its White House reporter. Copley can't afford to send its economics reporter.

—Dante Chinni

Chinni is a Washington-based free-lancer.

PRIZES

HOW THE COPS SHOT BACK

The Boston Globe in late January sent off its entries for the 1998 Pulitzer Prizes. Among its twenty-nine nominees was a series exposing malfeasance in the Boston Police Department, with tales ranging from officers stealing evidence money to lying under oath in trials. Editor Matthew V. Storin promoted the work of the *Globe*'s Spotlight Team in a cover letter, which noted that the U.S. Attorney publicly thanked the paper after bringing indictments against two officers.

Boston police were not as grateful. On February 6, the department's head of media relations, Sgt. Det. Margot H. Hill, sent an eight-page letter and an inch-thick stack of appendices to all nineteen members of the Pulitzer board, charging that the *Globe*'s series was unfair. *Globe* editors learned of the correspondence and, on February 14, published an article about the cops' action. In the story Hill said she acted after mysteriously obtaining a copy of the *Globe*'s Pulitzer entry.

These unusual events raised several questions. First, how valid are police criticisms of the *Globe* series? Second, how unusual is it for aggrieved subjects to take their case to the Pulitzer hierarchy? What do the Pulitzer officials do when faced with such a challenge? And finally, how did the cops get the entry?

From the top: the *Globe*'s Spotlight Team put together several hard-hitting stories and no significant facts in them have been refuted. Police complaints fall into two categories. They say that the *Globe* focused on events that took place several years ago and downplayed reforms under the current commissioner. True, many activities detailed by the *Globe* stretch back five years or more, but this was not all a history lesson. In fact, the two cops accused of stealing money pleaded guilty on March 6. Police complaints that the paper could have included more about reform seem self-serving.

The cops' other key complaint is that the *Globe* didn't include letters in its entry written by police officials that question the stories. This charge cuts a little closer to the bone, especially considering a 1994 rule addition in which Pulitzer entrants are required to include "any significant challenge to the accuracy or fairness" of articles submitted.


The Boston Globe

SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 18, 1995

Corruption probe shakes up Boston detective unit

Officers are disciplined in drug-raid inquiries

Spotlight

The case of the disappearing money

A *Boston Globe* police exposé

Police officials think their letters qualify. And, "In hindsight," says Storin, "I would have thrown them in."

Preemptive challenges to Pulitzer entries are rare, but not unheard of. "There have been several other instances where someone anticipates" a Pulitzer entry and writes to oppose the stories,

PULITZER JURORS SAY IT'S ONLY FAIR THAT THEY SEE WHAT COMPLAINTS HAVE BEEN RAISED ABOUT AN ENTRY

says Seymour Topping, administrator of the Pulitzer Prizes since 1993. When such challenges *are* made, how does the Pulitzer office handle them? Topping says if his office receives a challenge letter "by responsible individuals," it is included in the supplementary materials with an entry. (Under Pulitzer procedure, five jurors go over entries in each category and send three finalists from each to the Pulitzer board, along with a written appraisal. The board names the winners.)

Only about a half-dozen entries have brought such surprise challenges during Topping's tenure. ("Usually from lawyers," he notes.) This year two entries in addition to the *Globe* series drew challenge letters. But none of these three entries, or any past entry that included a challenge letter, ever made it to the short list from which finalists are chosen. If they had, Topping said he would give the newspaper a chance to rebut the challenge. Pulitzer jurors and board members, he says, need "the fullest possible information to make intelligent decisions."

Jurors say it's only fair that they get a chance to see if questions have been raised about an entry. "The sense that I have from jurors is that the more information they have, the better," says Caroline Brewer, a columnist for *The Record* in Hackensack, New Jersey, and a Pulitzer juror this year. Newspapers have been good about including known challenges with their entries. Alex Jones, a Pulitzer winner and a journalism professor at Duke University, says that as a juror this year he helped review one entry that included a full-page ad refuting the newspaper's work (along with a rebuttal by the paper). The entry was nominated as a finalist anyway. And Brewer says she appreciated it when *The Philadelphia Inquirer* included editorials from *The Wall Street Journal* that criticized the *Inquirer*'s work.

What seemed unprecedented in this year's *Globe* case was that the cops said they had a copy of the *Globe*'s Pulitzer entry. Sgt. Det. Hill told the *Globe* she received it from an anonymous source.

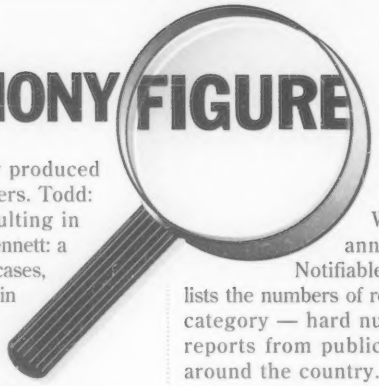
However, when pressed by CJR, Hill changed her story, admitting that she never did have the *Globe*'s Pulitzer entry, only a promotional reprint that she thought might be a prize entry.

—**Stephen J. Simurda**

Simurda, a free-lance writer and a journalism teacher at the University of Massachusetts in Amherst, is a frequent CJR contributor.

FACTOID WATCH

FOOD POISONINGS' PHONY FIGURE



About 9,000 Americans die every year from food poisoning . . .
The Associated Press, December 17, 1997

When food-borne illness became a major public policy issue, propelled by a series of high-profile outbreaks over the past four years, the press naturally wanted to know how many die from it. A figure of 9,000 Americans per year emerged. But where did the figure come from?

A Nexis check shows that some stories attributed it to a variety of sources, including the U.S. Department of Agriculture, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the General Accounting Office, and congressional testimony. Many more, if not most, did not attribute it at all, as if the number were one of those accepted truths that require no attribution, like "squirrels have bushy tails."

But it isn't. My editor told me to locate the source and determine its veracity. "If that many people are dying of food poisoning," she asked, "why haven't we heard of a case locally?"

I found dozens of stories that used the same figures — a range of 6.5 million to 33 million people are sickened and approximately 9,000 die each year. I focused on the fatality figure because it is a number that can be quantified. Deaths are recorded.

I started with the USDA. A spokesman said the department uses the number, but that it came from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention in Atlanta. A spokesman there said the number comes from a scientific paper known as the Altekruse report. She faxed it to me.

And there it was, that same number, only footnoted. The footnote revealed the number came from something called the Council for Agricultural Science and Technology, or CAST, a think tank located in Ames, Iowa. In 1994 it issued a report, "Foodborne Pathogens: Risks and Consequences," which I obtained.

A task force created by the think tank specifically to study the foodborne pathogen issue had relied upon two researchers — Dr. Ewen Todd, a microbiologist, and Dr. John Bennett, medical doctor — to come up with annual estimates of illnesses and deaths caused by food poisoning. They produced wildly different numbers. Todd: 12,581,630 cases resulting in 522.7 annual deaths. Bennett: a lower number of total cases, 6,485,755, but resulting in a higher 8,982 deaths. Both scientists had used mathematical models to arrive at an estimate. Neither model was based on known cases.

When its report was issued with an accompanying press release, CAST adopted Bennett's 9,000 figure. Todd's fatality estimate was not used.

Before getting on the phone, I called up the Centers for Disease Control's Web site for the annual Summary of Notifiable Diseases, which lists the numbers of recorded deaths by category — hard numbers based on reports from public health officials around the country. The differences between those numbers and Bennett's were striking.

According to Bennett, for example, 1,000 people die annually from trichinosis, a pork parasite. According to the CDC, only one trichinosis death has been recorded in the past *ten* years. Bennett posited 28 deaths per year from typhoid fever, which is carried by shellfish; the CDC recorded a total of 21 over a ten-year period. (The CDC has not been tracking E.coli deaths long enough to have a number.)

I put all this to Dr. Tanya Roberts, co-chairman of CAST's task force. "Notifiable deaths are horribly under-reported," she said. What the CDC has, "is a legal record, not a medical record."

Roberts concedes that some of Bennett's numbers may be inflated: "Until we do a good analysis I would say we don't know for sure. I don't know where the truth lies, and I don't think anyone else does. I said *up to* 9,000 deaths [in the press release]. I don't think Todd is accurate and I don't think Bennett is accurate. The truth is somewhere else, or in between."

Still, Roberts said she leans towards the higher number, because "Bennett's science is the best to date."

Nonetheless: numbers that were based on one researcher's best guess have achieved the status of unassailable truth simply by being run through several spin cycles until they were adopted without attribution by many reporters.

Somewhere in the cycle comes a new phenomenon; I call it unattributed-numbers bracket creep. This from *U.S. News & World Report*, November 24: "Each year up to 81 million Americans suffer a food-borne illness; 9,100 die." And this from *USA Weekend*, January 23: "Deaths from tainted food topped 10,000 last year . . . ." In neither story were sources cited for the rising numbers. **—Dan Wilson**

Wilson is a reporter for the Appleton, Wisconsin, Post-Crescent.

MOFFETT CECIL

LANGUAGE CORNER

"MEDIA" MATTERS

We can skip examples of the use of the word as a singular. They're practically infinite, and maybe the holdouts (like CJR) for "media" as a plural will be overrun someday. But there are arguments for trying to mount a counterattack.

One has to do with literacy. The word has a useful and much-used singular form, "medium." It came from the Latin into English along with its Latin plural, "media," and both have been established in English since time immemorial. (The Anglicized "mediums" is rare these days, except in reports on the spirit world.) How can "medium" and "media" both be singular? It's not logical, and really not literate, despite myriad examples of misuse.

Another argument for the plural is philosophical. Public figures like to blame journalists and journalism for all that isn't lovely in their lives. They consistently say sneeringly that "the media is" whatever, as if all of us in the ol' news game were the same. But even in a period when traditionally responsible news outlets wallow in sleaze from time to time (and agonize later), it's unfair to imply that the best and the worst among us are indistinguishable. Subtly, "the media is" does that. We do well to fight for the plural, and to be even clearer by specifying "the news media" when we aren't talking about the trash peddlers or infotainment folks. A subtle counterattack is fair, and literate.

—Evan Jenkins

For more on the language, see CJR's Web site at www.cjr.org.

FIRST PERSON

WAR WOUNDS IN DETROIT

In July 1995, on the first day of a strike at *The Detroit News* and *Detroit Free Press*, I wrote in my journal that the newspapers would never be the same, that they'd be smaller, and that they might not employ me. I was right.

At the time, I was the *Free Press* labor writer. This had been a choice job in Detroit for decades. The beat reflected the city's industrial power. It helped express the egalitarianism that the *News* and *Free Press* saw as essential to their mass appeal. The *News*, for example, had prospered in the 1870s under E.W. Scripps, who promised to serve "that large majority of the people who are not so rich in worldly goods."

Last October, I declined to return to the *Free Press*. The paper offered me a suburban government beat, but this was a demotion. I thought it trivialized the skills I'd developed over twenty years of working in and covering the auto industry. The company for which I was working by that time, Bloomberg News, didn't have a union. But it was happy to use my skills, and it's more focused on serving customers than the *Free Press*. I thought it had a bright future. It pays better. So I stayed.



PATRICIA BECK

John Lippert in his office in Southfield, Michigan

Today there is no labor writer at either newspaper. Like many other newspapers, the *News* and *Free Press* now rely on "worklife" stories with more career advice than hard news. The beat died with the strike. So did something about the two newspapers.

I never once considered scabbing. Eight months into the strike, I became chairman of the *Free Press* unit of The Newspaper Guild. At first, the strike seemed larger than life. I remember a thwack, thwack sound as strikers and security men beat each other with sticks, standing atop barricades. As the months rolled by, however, I got depressed when we sang "we are the union, mighty, mighty union." The more we sang, the weaker we got.

Gannett Co. Inc., which owns the *News*, and Knight Ridder, which owns the *Free Press*, won the strike, in the sense that they never missed a day's production. But they paid a price. In dollar terms, they lost about $130 million in 1995 and 1996. When you add in profits they would have earned, I figure they lost some $300 million.

As of February, the newspapers' had a combined unaudited weekday circulation of 617,671. That's down from 888,719 when the strike began, and from 1.2 million when the two newspapers launched their joint operating agreement in 1989. On weekdays, only about 29 percent of metropolitan Detroit households get either paper, down from 43 percent before the strike.

The newspapers thought they could afford to lose union-minded readers who shop at discount stores as long as they retained those who shop at Neiman-Marcus. But they trashed that sense of egalitarianism that helps hold a community of readers together. They reached too far when they talked, in an internal videotape, of creating a new culture in Detroit, the home of Reuther and Hoffa. They'd be better off today if, instead of remaking the culture, they'd made a deal.

The strike exposed the outdated approach of the unions, too. When our main Teamsters local declared war on Gannett, it was using rotary telephones. It had no computers. We underestimated the newspapers' ferocity because we underestimated long-term threats to their survival. We lacked discipline, and engaged in vandalism that fueled a racketeering lawsuit that could eventually destroy the local unions. We waited nineteen months before offering to return without a contract, and the delay eviscerated legal remedies that such an offer made possible. I believe in unions, but they could die if they don't make better decisions than we made in Detroit.

For now, the unions' best hope lies in the courts. The newspapers were convicted by a National Labor Relations Board judge last year of bad-faith bargaining. If that decision is upheld by the NLRB board itself and the federal courts, it could result in back pay for strikers worth many millions of dollars, and help force real bargaining. This could take years, however.

Tony Ridder, the Knight Ridder chairman, told Wall Street recently that the newspapers could earn a combined $40 million in 1998, and could reach their long-term target of a 20 percent profit margin in three years. However, he acknowledged that the strike's legal and emotional aftershocks could prevent that. "The key to getting into the 20s is how fast the revenue comes back," Ridder said.

Now a new revenue threat has emerged. Frank Shepherd, a former Stauffer Communications executive, incorporated a company in 1997 called 21st Century Newspapers Inc. He has bought two dozen dailies, weeklies, and shoppers stretching from Detroit to the Michigan "thumb." As he builds more presses he will exploit the hottest newspaper trend — "clustering," through which retailers can buy packages of weekly or daily ads, in selected neighborhoods, in any combination.

Shepherd says the strike contributed directly to his ability to assemble $300 million in Wall Street loans, since it weakened the urban dailies. He describes the *News* and *Free Press* as "excellent Wayne County newspapers," incapable of a statewide reach. He is the entrepreneur now, he says: "I feel like E.W. Scripps."

When the *Free Press* requested a bigger suburban staff to compete with Shepherd, Knight Ridder approved fifteen new editors and reporters, half as many as the newspaper wanted. Approval will be rescinded, the company said, if circulation doesn't rise measurably this year.

This summer, on the third anniversary of the strike, the editorial staff of the *Free Press* will abandon its seventy-year-old headquarters and move into the old pressroom of the nearby *News* building. The move symbolizes not just change, but a painful, self-inflicted decline.

—John Lippert

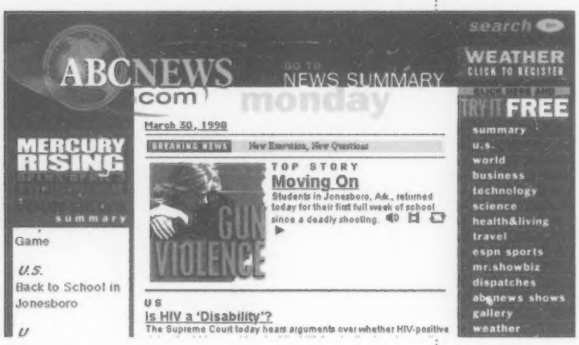
Lippert, a former automobile assembly-line worker, spent eight years at the Free Press.

WEB SITE SPOTLIGHT

abcnews.com

More and more Americans get their news and information from the Internet. What kind of journalism are they finding? CJR's *Web Site Spotlight will try to answer that question by putting individual sites through a CAT scan. Our first examines ABCNEWS.com.*

When word filtered out in late 1996 that ABC News was about to launch a Web site, some cognoscenti felt the respected broadcaster was entering the Internet fray a little late. CNN and MSNBC already had high-profile sites, not to mention Fox News Channel and all the sites run by the major newspapers and magazines. Did the Internet need yet another mega-news site? How would ABC stand out in a crowded field?



http://www.abcnews.com

A year after the launch of ABCNEWS.com, the answer is clear. The site has capitalized on the strengths of its parents, ABC TV and radio ("more Americans get their news from ABC News than from any other source") and the Internet giant Starwave ("where more people click"), creator and producer of a number of online sports, news, and entertainment services, including ESPN SportsZone. ABCNEWS.com slickly packages the day's news, but also provides voluminous and often thoughtful context and analysis for visitors with longer attention spans.

Breaking news can test a news site, and ABCNews.com tends to pass. Soon after the school shootings in Arkansas, the site put together text stories, photographs, and video clips. By the next day the package had been expanded to include information on, and links to, a wide range of related topics, including firearm safety, child psychiatry, and the history of the other killings by children in Mississippi and Kentucky, even a link to the hospital where the victims were being treated.

Foreign news is well represented on the site. Especially compelling are the "dispatches," a series of repackaged and expanded TV stories from around the world. Business and technology reportage is strong, too, and often bolstered by easy-to-read, informative graphics.

The site is true to its TV roots. The *Nightline* pages, for example, have recaps and transcripts of recent episodes, as well as collections of excerpts from classic interviews, including Gary Hart, from 1987, Jim and Tammy Faye Bakker, from the same year, and Michael Dukakis, from two weeks before the 1988 election.

To make full use of the site visitors need a reasonably sophisticated computer and multimedia applications such as Real Video (downloadable from the Web). Getting around the site can be confusing, partly because there is too much action on some pages, with scrolling text, changing ads, and moving headlines. The search engine has a handy feature that allows you to search separately for text, sounds, and video, although the results are displayed in a confusing format.

Reporters may find the reference section useful. Pick one of the "country profiles," for instance, and you get a quick introduction to that nation, including its vital statistics. You can even listen to its national anthem. The reference section also carries a list of "newsmaker bios." Unfortunately, the bios are not updated regularly enough. As of early April, they did not include such newsmakers as Kenneth Starr or Monica Lewinsky. **—Sreenath Sreenivasan**

Sreenivasan (ss221@columbia. edu) teaches new media and broadcast at Columbia University's Graduate School of Journalism.

MOFFETT CECIL

TELEVISION

POOL FOR SCANDAL

Broadcast news feels your pain, scandal-weary America. In March, ABC News chairman Roone Arledge suggested that the mob of reporters and cameramen outside the federal courthouse in Washington, where a grand jury is hearing testimony in the Monica Lewinsky affair, could be whittled down to "two cameras instead of two hundred." Arledge called on his colleagues to stop "terrorizing innocent victims" such as the president's secretary, Betty W. Currie. "The picture of this poor lady fearing for her life while this whirl of people attacked her has stayed with me," he said.

A week after Arledge spoke, the three major networks, plus Fox and CNN, agreed to set up camera pools at the courthouse and at Kenneth Starr's home in suburban Virginia when he's in town. (It's still open season, however, at the Watergate, where Lewinsky lives.)

Camera pools are a tradition at the White House, on presidential trips, and on the presidential campaign trail, but not for a scandal *du jour*. So this arrangement gives the Lewinsky affair an institutional flavor that special theme music and running titles like "Investigating the President" have not. The pool arrangement may, as Arledge had hoped, help "restore some of the respect we have lost from the public." But with two-person camera crews at $2,300 a week for staffers — and some $1,300 a *day* for the free-lancers that this story had been requiring — it will also save the five networks money. That's something they'll need plenty of to stay on top of a story that never seems to end.

—Annys Shin

Shin is associate editor of National Journal.



Betty Currie and her attorney in media crush

AP WIDE WORLD/STEPHEN SAVOIA

FOLLOW UP

SELLOUT REVISITED

When Jeffrey Prosser, who heads a U.S. Virgin Islands telecommunications empire, announced in September that he was buying the Virgin Islands *Daily News* from Gannett, he assured the newsroom that he wouldn't diminish the paper's editorial integrity (see "Gannett's Sellout in Paradise," CJR, January/February).

Soon, healthy plans to launch a special edition for tourists and to revamp the paper's antiquated computer and phone systems were in the works. But other steps have caused worry. On January 5, five days after the sale, Penny Feuerzeig, the executive editor, was demoted and replaced by Mike Middlesworth, a newspaper consultant and former managing editor of *The Honolulu Advertiser*, who also took over as c.e.o. Feuerzeig had long been a thorn in the side of Governor Roy L. Schneider — a Prosser pal. Her hard-hitting style and leadership had helped earn the daily a 1995 Pulitzer and many other major awards.

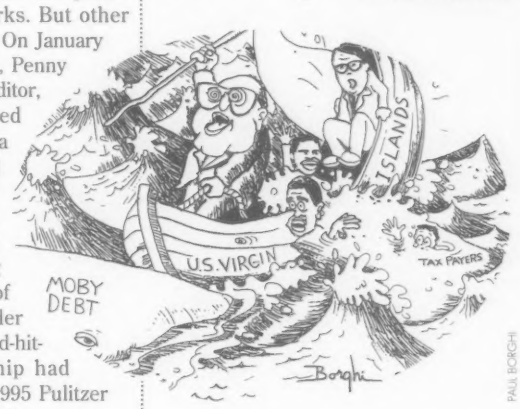
Now editorial page editor, Feuerzeig was joined by Prosser's corporate spokesman, Ed Crouch, on the four-member editorial board. Crouch, who worked under Feuerzeig at the *Daily News* before joining Prosser's company, says it is his task to represent his boss's views on the board. All editorials are faxed to Crouch for his approval. Soon after his appointment, Crouch wrote a pair of editorials praising a loan taken out by the government to pay outstanding debts. "Won't that be nice?" a January 14 editorial asked. "Some $64 million in years-old income tax refunds and $42 million in vendor payments will provide a giant sigh of relief for taxpayers and businesses." The editorial only glancingly noted that "Borrowing money to pay debts is not ideal."

Steve Rockstein, a design editor who left for *The Philadelphia Inquirer* in February, says that the laudatory tone of Crouch's first editorial "sent shockwaves around the newsroom." Middlesworth counters: "If you buy a newspaper you're entitled to have it reflect your views."

Middlesworth also took free-lancer Paul Borghi's weekly cartoon off proofs of the March 26 op-ed page after getting a call from Prosser's company. There is, he told CJR, "some unhappiness" with Borghi's constant criticism of Schneider — and the editor concurs: "There's plenty of blame to go around [for the territory's fiscal problems]. Borghi concentrates too much on the governor." Sure enough, two other cartoons submitted by Borghi that had been intended for future use were also scrubbed; Middlesworth said his work would probably never reappear, and Borghi said he was quitting anyhow.



Mike Middlesworth



PAUL BORGHI

One cartoon rejected by the new *Daily News* has the governor swamped by "Moby Debt."

A weekly op-ed column written alternately by reporters Eunice Bedminster and Will Jones was yanked in February. Middlesworth says that the decision was made because having "reporters write opinion pieces is damaging to their credibility." Yet in a confidential memo to Bedminster's boss Middlesworth wrote, "I have no problem with reporters writing columns — if they are writing about their area of expertise. As far as I know, Eunice [Bedminster] is neither a political writer nor a government reporter. We need to discuss this situation." The memo was dated January 22, the day that Bedminster wrote a column sarcastically titled WHAT A STATE THE TERRITORY IS IN. That state, she wrote, is, "Debt-ridden. Declining. Depressing."

Insiders give the new *Daily News* mixed reviews. "It's a disaster," says one staffer. "Within a month we've gone from a credible paper to a public-relations vehicle for the governor." But William Steif, a *Daily News* columnist until March, defends the new direction, pointing to a March 10 guest column, by local social commentator Randolph Thomas, which zeroes in on the territory's economic woes. Many Islanders await the paper's coverage of territory elections in November, before passing judgment.

And here comes some competition. In March, Rena Brodhurst, publisher of the *St. Croix Avis*, a small daily, launched *The Independent* for the island of St. Thomas, the *Daily News*'s base. In its first issue, the paper quoted *Daily News* founder Ariel Melchior, Sr. welcoming the launch. "It's a little early to tell but there is a trend," Melchior told CJR when asked about Prosser's influence on the *Daily News*. "There used to be an effort to represent local affairs as impartially as could be. That seems to be flagging now."

—Konstantin Richter

Richter is CJR's assistant editor.

SOUND BITE

"There are many dedicated journalists, great writers, great communicators, and executives who really believe in doing the right thing. And yet we seem to have been submerged by the bottom-liners who don't care about anything except making a few more dollars and a few more cents. And it's a shame. People have said to me, 'Audiences don't want quality.' I say to them, how can you give me this argument when some of the most successful programming on television is quality programming? I always refer them to *60 Minutes* and *Nightline*, not only because they're the best news programs on television but because they have a very high viewership. It's up to all of us in this business to put pressure on our bosses to understand that we have a pact with the people. We have a pact with our audience. We owe them something better than just a load of irrelevant garbage . . . . What is a great nation if its people are treated as a bunch of adolescents?"

Christiane Amanpour, CNN and CBS, at the 1998 Alfred I. duPont Forum on "Is This News?" at Columbia's Graduate School of Journalism.

ALFRED I. DUPONT COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY AWARDS

Entries are now being accepted for the annual Alfred I. duPont-Columbia University Awards in television and radio journalism. News and public affairs programs that originally aired between July 1, 1997, and June 30, 1998, are eligible. Awards are given for overall excellence in the following categories:

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Essay

by Mike Hoyt

The Next Big Thing

Some years ago I interviewed a man named Velikovsky, who had drawn ideas from the disciplines of psychology and astronomy, history and geology, to fashion a grand theory that explains mankind's eagerness to mess about with weapons of mass destruction. Though taller, Velikovsky looked like Einstein, perhaps not unintentionally. Same hairstyle.

His theory in a nutshell was that some time before recorded history the earth and its inhabitants had undergone a terrible trauma, probably from giant asteroids or comets, and that, just as a troubled individual unconsciously recreates his past, troubled mankind does, too. We are driven by our collective unconscious to reproduce that horror. The cure, I gathered, was to recognize and defeat the syndrome via some sort of mass psychoanalysis. How he would get the human race onto a couch was not clear.

I am sorry to report that, with all the wisdom of a twenty-something cub reporter, I turned the big-haired thinker into a figure of fun. I regret it. Now I find myself struggling for a grand unifying theory of my own to explain the recent pattern.

Which pattern, you ask? The media pattern: our recent creation of ever larger, ever more amazing stories to mesmerize and release the entire wired planet. Think back through the mists of time: John Wayne Bobbitt, Tonya Harding, O.J., Princess Di, Monica. Each time we think, "How can we top that?" Each time we do.

◆

Remember the episode — was it *Star Trek*? — in which the people in a certain earth-like planet are orderly and civilized until this large gong-thing goes off. Then they drop all restrictions and go briefly, thrillingly wild. The period of insanity seems to serve as a pressure-relief valve, allowing for long periods of dull normality. Perhaps we in the press are performing that relief-valve function now.

Except that the wilding sessions get bigger and wilder each time the big gong rings. What next?

There are patterns within the pattern, too. Each time the big story has a revelatory first stage, and when its factual fuel threatens to burn low we give it a media-on-media boost. We media folk talk to each other until we generate enough hot air to keep the thing aloft. Roll down my radio dial: here's Don Imus interviewing NBC White House correspondents David Bloom and Claire Shipman on where the Monica saga goes next; here's *Newsweek*'s Jonathan Alter on WABC pitching the latest from Mike ("It's a dirty job, but . . .") Isikoff. Here on my lawn is *The New York Times* with forty-six inches on Ken Starr's lack of p.r. skill, his temporary inability to shape the saga as it morphs through the news cycles. On my magazine stand is David Brock's apology to Bill Clinton in *Esquire* for his 1994 piece in *The American Spectator* that helped trigger the whole mess. Story to mega-story to meta-story, news about the news, until finally the gong-thing rings again and we resume our orderly lives, secretly yearning for the next big thing. Why does this occur?

Like Velikovsky I have been up late thinking on this — Oh, the agony of the interdisciplinary stretch. I have managed to work out several theories that I am willing to float on a not-for-attribution basis. To wit:

IF YOU BUILD IT . . . Here on the cusp of the twenty-first century we have constructed a formidable news-delivery machine, quite capable of delivering news about the adventures of the First Member to downtown Baghdad or Santiago faster than you can say "according to a source familiar with the tapes." Like a muscle, this engine wants to be used. Damn the torpedoes. This is the same force that once had me testing my 1956 Buick at 110 miles per hour on a dark highway outside Kansas City. It whispers so powerfully, 'let's just see what she can do.'

MORE WINE, LOUDER WALLPAPER. It is striking to realize that not that many years ago TV — let alone TV news — was unavailable before noon and after the late movie. Remember the test pattern? Now, of course, we get news in the car, in the kitchen, in the shower, on the computer, all the hours. And we've devalued it. News has become electronic wallpaper. So we scream for attention. When we all have something red hot, we all scream together.

VAST RIGHT-WING CONSPIRACY. Velikovsky worried about weapons of mass destruction. What about mass distraction? Something there is that doesn't like an active, interested, uncynical citizen toting up such things as which percentage of Americans control what percent of the wealth. Let me quote the work of the rapper polarity 1, from the CD *News Goo*, inspired by Danny Schechter's book, *The More You Watch, The Less You Know*.

> News is not supposed to entertain
> to drug the soul to kill the pain
> but it all adds up to someone's capital gain . . .

MAY THE FORCE . . . You saw *Contact*. You know that TV signals travel to deep space, there to be picked up by aliens. What can they think of us, sorting through images of Kosovo and Al Gore and Pepcid AC? Meanwhile, scientists have discovered that the universe is racing apart from itself at an ever-accelerating rate, propelled by something mysterious they have labeled the Repulsive Force. Could we be driven to fill the resulting interstellar gaps, so vast and lonely, with a big loud story? Conversely, could the universe be racing away for a reason? Could the Repulsive Force be the televised image of William Ginsburg? Kenneth Starr?

DRESS REHEARSAL. Or maybe, as we tap dance toward the Millennium, we're unconsciously working our way up to the biggest headline of all: WORLD TO END. As we all know, a mile-wide asteroid is speeding our way at 45,000 miles per hour. Scientists first thought a possibility existed that at 1:30 P.M. on a possibly final Thursday, October 26, 2028, it might hit, causing "tidal waves, continent-size fires and an eruption of dust that could cause global cooling," as the *Times* so soothingly put it. NASA now says it will miss. But there are at least 107 others that could come dangerously close in the future. Maybe we have sensed this in our bones, at least since the O.J. Simpson trial. We've just been practicing.

These are mere theories, of course. But so is $e=mc^2$. You laugh? Ha. They laughed at Einstein. They laughed at Velikovsky. ◆

Mike Hoyt (mh151@columbia.edu) is CJR*'s senior editor.*

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Darts & Laurels

◆ **DART** to *60 Minutes*, for just not getting it. Having landed Kathleen Willey, the prize catch of the season in the Clinton sex-scandal competition, *60 Minutes* unfathomably let her off the hook. Questions that leaped to the mind of the ordinary viewer, not to mention the average student in Journalism 101, never came up; unclear waters were never plumbed. Net result: over the next twenty-four hours of unrelieved punditry and polling, and until the rest of the story began to surface in other outlets — her dire financial straits, her failed book contract, her history of dissembling, her gushing letters to Clinton — Willey basked in the warmth of an uncommon degree of credibility. Even more irresponsible than its handling of the interview was *60 Minutes*'s handling of the criticism that followed. On the Sunday evening after the by-then infamous March 15 interview, it fell to Andy Rooney to deflect the barbs. "Several reviewers complained that Ed Bradley was too soft interviewing Kathleen Willey," Rooney reported without elaboration, then moved on to render his own verdict: "I thought he did a good job." A reel of clips showing past Mike Wallace gotcha interviews swiftly appeared on-screen, lest anyone doubt that there are no flies on *60 Minutes* when it comes to being tough. Two weeks later, a wave of critical letters brought Rooney back again to mend the line. This time, the fault lay in the viewers — most dismissively, liberal viewers who "didn't want to hear anything bad about Clinton even if it was true." And viewers who dared to question the motives of executive producer Don Hewitt — whom Rooney has known since 1943! — and correspondent Bradley — whom Rooney has known for fifteen years! What with all that fog, *60 Minutes* managed to avoid entanglement with the very legitimate criticism of the journalism itself.

◆ **DART** to WBMG-TV, a CBS affiliate in Birmingham, Alabama, and president and general manager Eric Land, for throwing the baby out with the bathwater. With its Nielsen ratings sinking below what Media General Broadcasting, the station's parent, was apparently willing to swallow, Land went over the edge. On December 11, two weeks before Christmas, he fired the entire on-air staff — reporters, producers, editors, and all eight anchors — of the WMBG news department. Severance packages were offered, but only on the condition that staffers would agree to stay on the job until the end of the year, when a new and improved news team would be named. The staffers kept their part of the bargain, delivering the news through New Year's Eve. But on December 30, Land announced that during the month of January, WBMG would air no local news at all. Instead, two half-hour news slots showed only a ticking clock counting down to 5 P.M. on February 5, when local news, under the new call letters of WIAT, would return. Two other newscasts (of thirty and sixty minutes), which were replaced by syndicated sit-coms, have not returned.

◆ **LAUREL** to the Ann Arbor, Michigan, *News*, and medical reporter David Wahlberg, for giving the public the skinny on a puffed-up weight-loss program. In a March 16 article, Wahlberg exposed the naked truth about a series that began in February on Fox's WJBK morning news show in Detroit. The year-long series, designed to follow the efforts of anchor Alan Lee to get in shape — exercising, dieting, consulting with experts at the University of Michigan Medical Center — involved a questionable arrangement between WJBK and the center. Not only did the center waive Lee's $3,000 enrollment fee, Wahlberg revealed, but it also made WJBK fatter by $60,000 in promotional spots. Defending his station's pursuit of what he refers to as "integrated marketing," general manager Jim Clayton didn't even try to put a fig leaf on his bottom line. "We're in this business to make money," he told *The Ann Arbor News*'s Wahlberg. "We're not going to give you all sorts of news coverage and not expect something in return." (In subsequent interviews with the two major Detroit dailies, Clayton denied any such quid pro quo.)

◆ **DART** to *The Star-Ledger*, in Newark, New Jersey, for putting its news judgment in jeopardy. The paper devoted four page-one stories (February 3,4, 9,10) to a breathless, falsely suspenseful first-person account by its pop-music critic, Claudia Perry, of her appearance as a contestant on the TV game show *Jeopardy!* ("I can't tell you what happened — it's against *Jeopardy!* rules," explained Perry in her opening piece. "But I will keep writing periodically about my Tournament of Champions experience.") From the first, above-the-fold headline (OUR CLAUDIA'S IN *JEOPARDY!*) to the last misstep in the semifinals (OUR CLAUDIA ENDS *JEOPARDY!* RUN), the reports, which were timed to coincide with (and no doubt promote) broadcasts of the previously taped shows, comprised some 172-column-inches, including a

sidebar and six photos, four of them in color on the *Star-Ledger*'s front page. (Ignoring this excess, an article on the series in the February 7 *Editor & Publisher* noted approvingly that "readers can expect to hear more of her experiences as a game-show contestant.")

◆ **LAUREL** to *Chicago* magazine managing editor Shane Tritsch, for a smashing return on a journalistic investment. In the course of producing one of those predictably flattering profiles of the "Beardstown Ladies" — that adorable group of Illinois women whose purported wisdom in the ways of Wall Street has brought them fame and fortune and followers — Tritsch paused to read the fine print on the copyright page of one of their best-selling stock-picking books. There, a note explained that in calculating their return on investments — a stupendous 23.4 percent a year — the ladies included the accumulating dues that members paid monthly into the investment club's account. The clear flaw in that formula, Tritsch concluded in his entertainingly corrective piece in *Chicago*'s March issue, means that the rate of return claimed by the Beardstown Ladies is in fact, "a bunch of hooey." What's more, his detailed analysis suggested that the media darlings may have actually underperformed the market. Indeed, a subsequent Price Waterhouse audit of the ten years 1984 to 1993 found an annual average rate of return of a meager 9.1 percent.

◆ **DART** to the *New York Post*, for an ethical breach that exceeded its grasp. On its February 5 editorial pages, the paper published a letter to the editor from one Scott Pellegrino that bore some striking dissimilarities to what Pellegrino had written. To begin with, one paragraph, which took issue with columnist Jack Newfield for favorably assessing the contributions of the Kennedys while ignoring their role in Vietnam, had been embroidered with some brand new words: "they are a bunch of really, really swell guys — despite the odd drowned blonde, seducing the babysitter, etc." On top of that, Pellegrino's next paragraph, which took issue with Newfield for being insufficiently critical of Mario Cuomo's silence about "the duplicitous Bill Clinton," had also been embroidered. Pellegrino's original words: "If Mario Cuomo had any genuine allegiance to this country and its people, he would have shouted for all the world to hear that Bill Clinton was a creep." The enhanced version in the *Post*: "If he had cared about the moral squalor a Clinton presidency would inflict on this country, he would have shouted for all the world to hear that Bill Clinton was a creep and not to be trusted." Worse yet, when Pellegrino, producer of *The Jay Diamond Show* on New York radio station WEVD, called to complain about the "offensive" language interjected in his letter and to ask for a correction, he got a lecture on editorial responsibility. "My friend," he was told by John Podhoretz, the *Post*'s recently appointed editorial page editor, "you don't know what you're talking about . . . . I'm an editor and I've been an editor for twenty years and editing includes rewriting and additions where necessary . . . . There's not going to be a correction." (Pellegrino did, however, get the last word. Having tape-recorded his conversation with the *Post*, Pellegrino played it for its rival papers all over town, as well as for *The Washington Post* and CJR. Podhoretz apparently saw the light. On February 14, an apology appeared on the editorial page; on February 16, Roger Franklin, Podhoretz's overly creative copy editor, was fired; and on February 19, Pellegrino's letter was printed again, without further enhancement, comment, or ado.)

◆ **DART** to the Costa Mesa, California. *Breeze*, a publication of *The Orange County Register*, for blowing against the wind. The weekly insert's February 19 edition carried a perfectly fine, thirty-five paragraph story, accompanied by an 5-by-3-inch photo, on the local chamber of commerce's Woman of the Year award to one Maria Elena Avila, a restaurateur. In a separate, equally worthy story, the paper reported on the organization's Businessperson of the Year award to one Dave Cline, a manufacturer. But the *Breeze* somehow couldn't rustle up even a whiff of news about the chamber's Man of the Year award, which honored one Tom Johnson. A possible explanation: Johnson is publisher of the Costa Mesa *Daily Pilot*, a competitor of *The Orange County Register*.

◆ **DART** to the *Times Colonist*, in Victoria, British Columbia, for buttering-up a major advertiser. The October 31 edition carried a cheesy photo of the paper's editor-in chief, Bob Poole, raising a cup in a smiling toast to a new line of products at the Island Farms Dairies. Next to the contented editor stood Island Farms's "Farmer Vicki," a promotions assistant sporting overalls and straw hat, and "Daisy," the promotions department's version of a huge, healthy cow.

This column is written by Gloria Cooper, CJR*'s managing editor, to whom nominations should be addressed.*



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BLACKS IN THE NEWSROOM

Progress? Yes, but ...



The Baltimore *Sun* 1975



The Baltimore *Sun* 1998

BY DAVID K. SHIPLER

The good news first: the executive editors of the *Detroit Free Press* and *The Courier-Journal* in Louisville are black. So are the managing editors of *Newsweek*, *The Boston Globe*, *The Miami Herald*, *The News Journal* in Wilmington, and the *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*. Black publishers include those of the *Akron Beacon Journal*, the *San Jose Mercury News*, *The Modesto Bee*, and the *Asheville Citizen-Times*.

African-Americans are also gaining influence as columnists, editorial page editors, assistant managing editors, and reporters on key beats. Along with Hispanics, Asian-Americans, and Native Americans, they are aggressively recruited through job fairs, minority internships, and bonus-driven hiring programs. Their publications have grown more sensitive to the nuances of racial slights and ethnic stereotypes, and some papers even do annual "content audits" to assess how minorities and women are portrayed in pictures and print.

Is this a creeping revolution?

Yes, but . . . While the complexion of major newsrooms has shifted from the virtually all-white of thirty years ago, the rate of change has now slowed; the representation of blacks on news staffs has stagnated at a low plateau of under 6 percent, reports the American Society of Newspaper Editors. And blacks moving into managerial ranks remain too scarce to be counted as a reform completed. "Minority reporters call our news meetings the 'Pale Male Club,'" says a white reporter at *The Sun* in Baltimore.

This bad news gets more tangled when coverage is assessed for its sophistication and focus. Papers and magazines are writing more respectfully about rap, hip-hop, and other cultural features of African-American life. Black executives have made the cover of *Fortune*. And you can bet that *Time* will never again darken a photograph of O.J. Simpson. But reporting on race often features the simplistic stridency of ideologues and extremists; the clash of polemics crowds out the subtler biases that need exami-

THE BALTIMORE SUN

David K. Shipler, a former New York Times *correspondent and Pulitzer Prize winner, is the author of* A Country of Strangers: Blacks and Whites in America.

nation. Blacks are hurt disproportionately by inadequate coverage of the nation's urban problems.

The revolution holds promise but has not kept all its promises. Among white journalists surveyed in 1996 by the Associated Press Managing Editors Association, 77 percent agreed that "a news staff should reflect society in terms of racial/ethnic makeup," and 86 percent thought that "a diverse newsroom staff strengthens news coverage and credibility." But there is no chance of realizing the ambitious goal for the year 2000, set twenty years ago by the editors' association, ASNE, that would have brought minorities as a whole — African-Americans, Hispanics, Asian-Americans, and Native Americans — to the same proportion as in the country at large. Newsrooms are now 11.5 percent minority and 5.4 percent black; the country is 26 percent minority and 13 percent black.

Facing the inevitable failure, ASNE's officials have proposed a reduced objective for a more distant date — 20 percent by 2010. The suggestion, scheduled for a vote by the board in the fall, ignited a divisive debate at the association's April meeting in Washington, where some editors urged higher targets and minority journalists' organizations worried that lower goals would allow the industry to rationalize a broad retreat.

The industry, though, is not especially happy with itself. "Any white journalist in a town that's predominantly black begins to feel like it's more and more of a problem," says a white reporter for the Baltimore *Sun*, whose news and editorial staff is 12.3 percent African-American. "It's a practical problem in the sense that you literally don't find out about stories, because it's a very segregated town." It's also a public relations problem; some of the city's black activists denounce the paper for racism when it reports critically on local black politicians.

The editors of *The Sun*'s editorial and op-ed pages are black women. The deputy sports editor and the editor of Perspective, a Sunday section of opinion and analysis, are black. But not until recently were moves made to bring blacks into positions where they could govern daily news coverage.

Last November, a committee organized by management spent two days in a hotel drawing up a wish list for the newsroom that ran from the mundane to the expensive, from more coathangers to updated computer terminals. Then the committee met with top editors to present their ideas. Under the ground rules, the editors were to say yes or no on the spot or, if they needed more time, set an early deadline for a response. As it happened, all ten committee members were white.

Nothing significant happens without pressure from the top

"To the amazement of upper management, the number one proposal that came out of *The Sun*'s own newsroom was a call for greater diversity on our staff," says Jean Thompson, who has just become the first black assistant managing editor for staff development.

The all-white committee expressed "almost universal support" for increased minority hiring, says a participant. "We were particularly aware that there were no black assignment editors in a position to influence the daily news in a grass roots sort of way." Over the next five years, the committee urged, two out of every five new reporters and one out of every three new managers should be members of minority groups.

The senior editors "expressed discomfort with the idea of quotas," the participant reports. "They said they 'certainly feel very strongly about this, work very hard at this,'" he recalls, yet "they had filled a bunch of editing jobs with almost exclusively white males they knew from before.

"I was sitting there with this dual perspective, being a white guy myself and looking at these guys somewhat from



The Kansas City Star 1956



The Kansas City Star 1998

THE KANSAS CITY STAR

The Baltimore *Sun*, whose newsroom (left) has gone from practically no blacks in 1975 to 12.3 percent in 1998, is just beginnirg to place blacks in significant editing positions. *The Kansas City Star* has been making intense efforts to hire and promote blacks and improve race relations in its newsroom. Above right: assistant city editor John M. Martelarro (at keyboard) with reporter Steve Penn.

the outside, with a reporter's skepticism. If merit is driving this whole thing, then by some miracle, like winning the Publisher's Clearing House sweepstakes, the best people in the whole world after this extensive search turned out to be these white guys I used to work with." He quotes another committee member as saying later, "We would have never accepted that kind of bullshit from anyone we were covering."

Shortly thereafter, during a search for two assistant city editors, Robert Guy Matthews, a black reporter, declared that the day the paper hired two blacks for those jobs he would put salt on his shoe and eat it. He thought he had a sure bet. But on March 26, after the announcement that two blacks had indeed been hired for the two assistant city editor slots, Matthews had a friend bake a cake, with chocolate icing, in the shape of a giant shoe. In the newsroom at the end of the day, with the top editors and a raucous assortment of colleagues present, the cake was devoured. Matthews ate his piece with salt.



THE BALTIMORE SUN/BARBARA HADDOCK

Jacqueline Thomas talks with executive editor John S. Carroll on her appointment as editorial page editor of the Baltimore *Sun*

Following the committee's appeal, management also promoted Jean Griffith-Thompson to do recruiting, hiring, and training, and to play a news role by sitting in on "daily news meetings, page-one meetings," she explains, "and contributing my perspective on what should be on page one, how stories should be developed, what is news and what is not."

Skeptical colleagues are watching how Thompson's news role evolves and how much authority she gets, for true integration requires more than mixing races in a room; it demands the sharing of power. That has not happened in years past, observes Mark Whitaker, the black managing editor of *Newsweek*. "There was too much of an emphasis on numbers per se without regard to what kind of impact minorities were having on the publication," he says. "The magazine was going out and recruiting black journalists; they'd end up being the number three or four general assignment reporter in a domestic bureau, or they'd end up being the junior writer in one of the sections here in New York. The numbers would look fine, but my view was that you didn't have a lot of blacks in positions where they could have an impact on the magazine. What I've tried to do is attract people to the magazine who will really have an impact."

Part of that impact lies in creating new networks for blacks equivalent to those that have been so beneficial to whites. The black journalist John Dotson, Jr., now publisher of the *Akron Beacon Journal*, brought Whitaker into a *Newsweek* internship in 1977. In turn, Whitaker has been decisive in hiring blacks such as Ellis Cose ("someone I've known for a long time") and the young writer Veronica Chambers ("whom I knew because I served on a board with her").

"People will always hire people that they're comfortable with," says Roy S. Johnson, a black who's an editor-at-large at *Fortune*. "To do otherwise requires an effort, and not many people are willing to make that effort. Not many people are willing to expand their Rolodexes when they have an opening." Black editors help expand the Rolodexes.

Newsrooms are not hermetically sealed against the prejudices that play perniciously just beneath the surface of American life. "Time Inc. operated out of a culture that presumed that good writing was a genetic trait primarily held by Caucasians," says Joel Dreyfuss, a black senior editor at *Fortune*. "There was the idea that you had to find extraordinary black people who would meet those standards, while you could find a lot of ordinary white people who would meet the standards."

Evaluations tainted by what he calls "the subtlety of racism today" can seem deceptively reasonable: "This guy doesn't quite measure up, doesn't quite fit in," are standard put-downs often reserved for blacks, Dreyfuss observes. A white is an aggressive reporter; a black is militant. "We bring our own racial attitudes in the society into the newsroom, but we don't acknowledge it. Journalism's holier-than-thou attitude also carries over to racial matters. 'We couldn't be racists. We're the good guys. We write about racism.'"

One result is that blacks' flaws are often remembered more vividly than whites'. The head researcher at a women's magazine complained about a black who had been "a terrible speller" and eventually left the job. "Within the same conversation ten minutes later," Dreyfuss recalls, "she talked about a young white woman who had been very successful at the magazine, and she said, 'You know, she couldn't spell, but . . .' It was exactly the same problem for both, but the other one was seen as brilliant and terrific."

Hiring mistakes are made more rarely when minorities are recruited to improve coverage rather than merely to defend against criticism or lawsuits, according to Keith Woods of the Poynter Institute for Media Studies. "When you're motivated by a desire to avoid trouble, who you bring in doesn't matter a whole lot to you," he notes, "and how they thrive or survive in the organization doesn't matter a whole lot to you. There are consequences of that: you do bone-headed work, which angers your readership. People you've brought in can't do the work they have to do, and motivation wanes."

In the 1980s, Whitaker saw a few examples at *Newsweek*. "In any institution there are whites who get ahead who aren't exactly fabulous," he says. "If a mediocre white journalist gets ahead, no one ever says it reflects on the overall quality of white reporters. If a mediocre black reporter is hired or promoted, then

everybody's going to say, 'Oh, they lowered the standards.' There are only a handful of those cases, but those handful were very regrettable. It didn't serve *Newsweek* well, and it didn't serve the reporters well."

Since then, print journalism has grown more sophisticated. Guidebooks and Web sites are full of advice on recruiting and managing a diverse workforce. Editors scour job fairs held by ASNE, the National Association of Black Journalists, and professional organizations representing Hispanic, Asian-American, and Native American journalists. ASNE, the Newspaper Association of America, and the major newspaper chains have full-time executives in charge of promoting diversity. Big dailies have internships for budding minority journalists, both to look them over and to induce the best of them to join the profession.

In a program named after the late columnist James Reston, for example, *The New York Times* takes on eight minority interns each summer to work in reporting, copy editing, photography, graphics, and design. The Times Company runs similar minority internships at its smaller papers. The Times Mirror chain hires recent college or journalism school graduates for two-year stints. During the first year, ten minority trainees work as reporters at the *Los Angeles Times*, and eight as copy editors at *Newsday*; for the second year, they are assigned among the company's seven papers, including the Baltimore *Sun*. Of the 170 trained so far, 95 percent have been offered full-time jobs, and 87 percent are still in journalism.

Nothing significant happens without pressure from the top. "Many managers feel they are open to diversity, but in practice they may not do very much," says Jose Ferrer, Time Inc.'s executive editor in charge of recruitment. "If you're not pushing at this, then you're probably not fixing it, and we're asking our managers to fix it. Just being polite to people of color is not enough."

The message is reinforced with bonuses and evaluations. When Norman Pearlstine became editor-in-chief of Time Inc. in January 1995, he says, "I found a situation not unlike what I'd found at *The Wall Street Journal*," where he had been executive editor. "A lot of people had done a lot of hard work and had tried a lot of things, and yet the results were, to be charitable, unsatisfactory. I would say we didn't have a credible number of black senior editors and writers, and hiring and training programs weren't delivering for us."

So he made diversity a significant factor in calculating bonuses for the managing editors of Time Inc.'s magazines, who may do the same with their subordinates if they choose. "Bonuses can be equal to base salary in a good year," Pearlstine explains. "Fifty percent of the bonus is based on the financial performance of the magazine and 50 percent on a subjective evaluation of performance." Twenty percent of that subjective part, or 10 percent of the entire bonus, is now linked, he says, to "how successful the managing editor of each magazine is in hiring and promoting minorities."



THE BALTIMORE SUN

Mike Adams, editor of Perspective, *The Sun*'s Sunday section of opinion. More minority hiring has been urged by white reporters.

Has it worked? "I can see some examples where it's worked; I can see some examples where it's too soon to tell. Some people who are here now tell me it's a step." Success will have been achieved, he says, when he can no longer count the changes on only two hands.

In the Knight-Ridder chain each publisher gets 5 to 15 points, out of 100, for fulfilling his newspaper's goal to increase minorities and women. According to Jacqui Love Marshall, assistant vice president for corporate learning and diversity, other points are awarded for profit, circulation, advertising revenue, meeting the budget, installing new technology, and the like. Since bonuses range from 20 percent to 60 percent of salary, failure to hire sufficient numbers of minorities and women can cut as much as 15 percent off a fairly lucrative payment. As a result, she says, even as the company has sold papers with substantial diversity and bought others with less, blacks have held steady at 9-10 percent of newsroom professionals.

Gannett includes coverage of minorities in considering publishers and editors for bonuses and promotions, say former employees. The policy has had a visible impact, but not one the chain seems comfortable discussing. During an entire month, repeated calls to ranking Gannett executives in charge of news and diversity, plus the senior vice president for public affairs and government relations, Mimi Feller, went unanswered. For weeks, Donna Faulk White, a public affairs specialist, said she was waiting for information from her bosses. Finally she conveyed the decision that Gannett would not comment because "we don't feel the company can get fair treatment in the *Columbia Journalism Review*." Asked what the magazine had done, she was unable or unwilling to say.

Some advocates of affirmative action worry that the climate of aversion to the policy is being felt in newsrooms. "People are just not serious about it," says Vanessa Williams, a *Washington Post* reporter who is president of the National Association of Black Journalists. She complains that some publications are cutting back on internships, which "suggests to me that there is not a level of commitment." The 1996 APME study found some backlash: 40 percent of white journalists thought that lower standards for promotion were applied to minorities, while 66 percent of blacks thought minorities were held to higher standards.

Other than Gannett, however, every news organization contacted spoke openly and enthusiastically about its drive to increase black staffers. Pearlstine quotes

one of his managing editors as saying, "Every time I have a vacancy I'm going to make sure I've found the best minority I can find and make sure he or she gets interviewed." Pearlstine declares: "If that's affirmative action, I think that's great. We ought to do more of it. The more diverse our work force is, the better we're going to cover our diverse society. I haven't felt that affirmative action backlash."

But there are built-in obstacles to finding black journalists. Many upwardly mobile African-Americans, not unlike children of immigrant families, are pushed by parents toward the prosperity brought by the professions of law, medicine, and business. Black communications majors frequently head for corporate public relations, not newspapers. If their ambitions include journalism it often means on-camera television with its higher pay.

The whiter a publication, the less attractive to a black journalist seeking a prospect of promotion. When blacks look at Time Inc., Jose Ferrer concedes, they see that "the power structure is still very white and very male. Half the magazines are run by women, but they are white women."

Even with blacks at 12.3 percent, the Baltimore *Sun* seems very white to African-Americans considering it as a place to work, Jean Thompson says — a feeling that may change with her and the two black assistant city editors in place. "When the candidate walks through the newsroom or sits in the page-one meeting and sees practically no one of color in a city that's 60 percent nonwhite, those impressions are stark," she observes. "One of the first questions they would ask is, 'What's going on here? Is everybody absent today? Tell me they're all out sick.' And we'd say, 'We're it, and we hope you'll keep us company!'"

A 1996 survey of journalists by ASNE, however, revealed blacks as more ambitious and optimistic than whites. Fifty-one percent of the whites and 64 percent of the blacks thought their chances for advancement were good or excellent. Fifty-four percent of the blacks aspired to be the top editor or publisher. Yet 54 percent of the blacks (and only 12 percent of the whites) said that people of color were treated unfairly in their newsrooms. And editors, both white and black, complain that many black reporters get frustrated and don't remain long enough to position themselves for promotion. "Few people of color stay in the same place for a long time, because we're taught to be nimble," says Roy Johnson. "You have to move out to move up."



THE KANSAS CITY STAR

Rhonda Chriss Lokeman, op-ed editor, *The Kansas City Star*

Those who advance often do so by blending in and playing down their blackness, according to some African-American journalists; institutional norms tend to sift out iconoclasts. By and large, "the screening process that brings blacks to top jobs really excludes the innovators," says Dreyfuss, "They're very conventional thinkers, like the guys who hire them. It's true for blacks and whites. . . . There's not a great diversity of coverage and thinking."

Homogenization is lamented by Jim Fisher, a crusty white reporter who has worked for *The Kansas City Star* since 1960. "I think there was more diversity when I started," he says of the white male staff in those days. "We had people who didn't have a high school education but were good with words and had a way of talking with people and empathizing with the guy in the bar and the steelworker." Empathizing with other whites, that is. "We didn't have black guys going out [as reporters], and that was a real minus," he says. But variety took other forms. "We had a guy who spoke perfect Russian; he was a Russian refugee. We had a guy who went on to become a big official in the Church of the Nazarene." Now, despite the racial diversity, there seems less diversity of experience. "There are almost no [military] veterans," he observes. "They all come out of the University of Missouri, the University of Kansas journalism schools."

If editors, in hiring a black, are looking for insight into Kansas City's black community, another white reporter observes, they'd better pick someone who grew up there and knows the neighborhoods. Being black from Denver won't do it.

But other white editors don't always recognize as newsworthy the attitudes and trends in black communities that they would report in white communities. Papers rarely write about blacks' religious faith, for example, or black women's hair styles.

For a story on fans' reaction to a local team's victory, a black reporter might suggest going to a black sports bar, explains Keith Woods, former city editor of the New Orleans *Times-Picayune*. The editor might respond with a blank look or with "the assumption that the story just became one about race, while it wasn't a minute ago," Woods says. "Black journalists struggle with offering those kinds of suggestions because of the fear of that phenomenon. They're recruited at black journalism associations, they're recruited at black universities. Their blackness is an issue, and they're asked to do everything black. But then that blackness is not mined. In fact, there is often an antagonism to it in the newsroom. 'Those people play the race card, those people are the militants.' You cannot survive in a business that you got into because of your passion, when they take your passion away."

A sense of incompleteness and marginalization can result. Black reporters sometimes feel that their objectivity is questioned by white editors, that their news judgment is considered suspect. Sometimes in a news meeting when a black journalist proposes a story drawn from his own experience, he has to "watch people respond with violent silence," Woods remarks. That happened when he criticized his paper for running only a short on Spike Lee's appearance at a local black college, with his film on

Malcolm X — a big event for blacks in the community. If the piece gets written, "the editing of the story takes the perspective out of it," he insists, not to eliminate bias, but to remove the reporter's voice as an African-American who brings his cultural insight to the subject.

Who a black journalist wants to be professionally varies with his individual character. Some African-Americans want to cover racial issues; others resent being ghettoized. Jack White, a black who is a veteran reporter in *Time*'s Washington bureau, offered to help report on the Clinton sex scandal. He was annoyed when, he recalls, a white editor in New York told him, "There do seem to be a lot of blacks involved, like Vernon Jordan — why don't you look into that?" Says White: "I used to be editor of the Nation section of *Time*, Chicago bureau chief. I've covered two presidential campaigns. I'm not just a race reporter."

ASNE urges editors to mentor minority reporters, not a bad management practice with whites as well. An employee told Ferrer of watching as young whites, but no blacks, went in and out of the office of a white editor who was reaching out to young people. "We're not talking about a bigot," Ferrer says. "We're talking about a liberal, but a liberal who didn't understand that it might not be so easy for an African-American on his staff to come into his office, and he had to take that initiative."

Once created, then, racial diversity has to be managed so that people's talents are harvested fully and the coverage is enriched. For the last six years, *The Kansas City Star* has undertaken such an effort. It has meant shedding a heavy legacy. In the nineteen-sixties, "we would not run pictures of black girls who were going to get married," Jim Fisher remembers. "There was a term on *The Kansas City Star* — a 'nigger killing.' One black guy killed another and it made two, three paragraphs. If there was a killing in the silk stocking district, we went balls out on that one — column after column."

The paper had made only shallow, grudging concessions to blackness by 1977, when it hired a black reporter, Lewis W. Diuguid. He says, "I was pretty much told, 'Be all that you can be as a white reporter and leave that black stuff at the door.' A large part of me wasn't making it into the job. A large part of me was being discounted. It made me feel uncomfortable, and it meant I wasn't giving all of myself to the work. Some [black] people said screw this, you want only a tenth of me in here? That's all I'm going to give. I'll give my eight hours and I'm out of here." Diuguid persisted, though, and is now a columnist and associate editor.

One morning in 1993, with the *Star* spread out on the breakfast table, "My youngest daughter, eight, ran by, stopped, and put her finger on the paper and said, 'That girl looks like me.' My oldest daughter could not say that when she was eight. I could not have said that growing up in St. Louis. This was just a nice picture of a bunch of kids in a feature story. The photographer, more aware now, had gone out and gotten an image of a person from another community."



THE KANSAS CITY STAR

Lewis W. Diuguid, columnist and associate editor, *The Kansas City Star*

How did that happen? In 1992, the white editor, Mark Zieman, organized a diversity committee, started content audits, and contracted with the Newspaper Association of America to train several staffers in leading diversity workshops. The audits reviewed random weeks of stories and pictures and counted positive and negative portrayals of minorities and women. In the world as typically portrayed, cute white children shopped with parents before school started, prosperous white men moved up through the ranks of business, and young black men wore handcuffs.

In Baltimore, *Sun* reporters and editors began auditing their coverage by analyzing the week of December 1, 1996. They noted that blacks and other minorities were usually portrayed as needy or in conflict. Stories focused "on our differences as people of different cultures," the report found, and features and business sections practically ignored nonwhites. "On first glance," an auditor wrote, "it would appear that minorities rarely travel, eat, or get married."

"We suggest that editors and reporters consciously look for ways to include women and the non-white citizenry in our coverage of universal topics," the first report said. "These are the stories that provide balance to the litany of crime and tension and poverty and government stories."

By the second report a year later, auditors found improvement but saw it as "slow and incremental, rather than sweeping and dynamic." The second report called for "the raising of the consciousness of the current staff" of the *Sun*.

That is what the *Star* has tried to do with diversity training. For $5,000 plus hotel and transportation costs, a paper can send a team of three (carefully chosen, supposedly) to a week-long course in presiding over dialogues. It is run by Toni Laws, senior vice president for diversity at the NAA, who then returns with the new workshop leaders and monitors their first couple of sessions in their own newsroom. In-house staffers are cheaper than outside consultants — and more credible, since the news business, Laws has discovered, is parochial enough to think of itself as unique and incomprehensible to outsiders. The danger is that leaders with only a week of training can get into trouble amid the emotions surrounding race and gender.

There may be no tougher audience than a bunch of skeptical reporters. "It was the most insane thing I've been through," says the *Star*'s Fisher. "They asked what we were afraid of, and I thought, what was the stupidest thing I could think of? I said I was afraid of chickens, and I didn't smile. And you would have thought that I said something very profound. Nobody laughed. They wrote it on the board. I left after six hours."

But Jeanne Meyer, managing editor for business and features, who is white, found that "people were quite open, and they took risks in exposing their feelings and exposing their hurts and exposing their anger. People treated [the discussion] thoughtfully. It made people feel quite good about colleagues." In small groups, everyone in the newsroom attended for a day and a half, and another round is being planned.

Diuguid feels the difference. "In those early days when I started, we were bringing [black] people in totally unprepared for the hostile culture they confronted," he says. "They were getting shot up, and they were leaving. So in changing the culture here, we've made this a better place to work."

A key question is how racial sensitivity and diversity affect what a reader sees in print. The Poynter Institute and ASNE have developed tips for "improving minority coverage," which are included in a booklet. It advises: "Tour your city regularly with a 'guide' or 'shepherd' from the neighborhoods with which you are unfamiliar. Write about human characters, real people, not just bureaucratic processes. . . . Make it easy for people in the neighborhoods to reach you . . . . Don't let place names become code words for crime."

The *Star* has taken steps in that direction. A computer file gives names of blacks and other minorities whom reporters can call as specialists in various subjects. It begins: "Accounting, Aging . . . " The business section's regular profile of people moving up the career ladder used to feature "just a bunch of white men," notes editor Zieman. "So we made a rule saying one out of three had to be a minority or a woman." The paper still gets complaints from some black leaders. But the usual reactions to the heightened visibility of blacks in the news columns divides a different way, Zieman says. "We get compliments from readers who appreciate what we're doing and criticisms from racists who don't. Some call us the Black Star. Those are calls I'm happy to get."

Counting people of color "can get nutty" when it happens in a virtually all-white town, says a white reporter who worked for the Lafayette, Indiana, *Journal and Courier*, a Gannett paper. "It got to be a joke around the newsroom" as photographers desperately searched the community for nonwhites, he says, often settling for Asian students at nearby Purdue.

There is no doubt that the presence of African-Americans in positions of influence can produce good story ideas that whites may overlook. When a white *Washington Post* editor assumed that Mayor Marion Barry was supporting the death penalty to pander to white voters, reporter Vanessa Williams suspected otherwise, and her interviews confirmed the growing endorsement of capital punishment among blacks. Mark Whitaker credits Allison Samuels, a black reporter in Los Angeles, with the idea for *Newsweek*'s cover piece last year on the generation gap between blacks from the civil rights movement and the hip-hop generation. Roy Johnson pushed for *Fortune*'s cover last August on the new, wealthy black entrepreneurs. "The big surprise to us," says Norman Pearlstine, "was that it was one of the highest selling *Fortunes* in years. It went right off the newsstands."

Many publications also use black staffers like litmus paper to test the acceptability of a questionable story or picture. A few Baltimore *Sun* reporters, including Ivan Penn, who is black, were approached one day and shown a photograph on the training of police dogs. A white policeman held the leash of a dog that was biting a black man on the arm. "My first reaction was, 'Whoa,'" Penn says. "Then I realized that he [the black man] was the trainer." The photograph was killed. "The sad thing is that in the ideal world that picture should have run. It was a nice action shot, and, in fact, the man was the trainer, so if anything he's in a very positive role."

To illustrate the role of jury consultants, *Time* prepared three panels in a drawing. The first showed "neutral" jurors whose featureless faces had the color that Crayola would call "flesh" in its crayons, recalls Janice C. Simpson, a black senior editor. The second showed sketchy features emerging, and the third — the jury resulting from consultants' advice — pictured "an almost riotous group leaping out of the box, diverse racially, ethnically, genderwise," Simpson says. She objected that the "neutral" jurors were colored to look like white people, implying that only whites could be unbiased. "The artists said, 'What are you talking about? That is a neutral color.' To me it looked like the color of white skin." Her protest got other people in the room thinking and provoked "a spirited debate" that resulted in the color being changed to gray.

No blacks were around to object when free-lance artist Matt Mahurin sent *Time* his darkened mug shot of O.J. Simpson. The magazine was closing on a Saturday, Simpson had been arrested the day before, and a skeleton crew was doing the cover on deadline. Mahurin declined to be interviewed, but *Time*'s art director, Arthur Hochstein remembers the goal as "a dramatic image — any kind of racial notion in it was just nonexistent." He pleads ignorance. "We stumbled on an aspect of racial coding that we weren't sensitive to," and he adds: "If we had a more diverse staff, and if they were here at the time, I think somebody would have said something like, 'Whoa!' And had they done it, we would have changed it — no doubt."

At a key time, no blacks were around to object

"That notion bothers me a lot," says *Newsweek*'s Mark Whitaker. "We're going to keep a few blacks around so they can save us from embarrassing ourselves. You should be hip enough and clued in enough to see this yourself."

The incident was not used by *Time* as an occasion for formal discussion or exploration of attitudes and dynamics at the magazine. "Did they really learn a lesson from it?" asks Jack White of *Time*'s Washington bureau. "Hell, no. No, they didn't do the kind of review I would have liked to have seen. It was the same pattern all the years I've worked there. You have a confrontation, you deal with the confrontation. The learning curve is zero."

Well, not quite zero, given Pearlstine's emphasis on increasing diversity. But one of the fundamental problems of race in America was illustrated by Hochstein's lack of attention to the power of darkness in the color of skin — so basic an element in a society long divided by just that power. As long as such influential whites are so oblivious, there will be a lot of educating to do. In many newsrooms, blacks are given that burden of educating. When many more whites become knowledgeable enough and no longer need to ask blacks for a reality check, that will be real revolution. ◆

In the Public Interest

by Lawrence K. Grossman

Does Local TV News Need a National Nanny?

Lord, save us from the saviors. In a dramatic, highly publicized move to reform local TV news, Rocky Mountain Media Watch, a Denver-based nonprofit group, has petitioned the Federal Communications Commission to deny the licenses of four hometown TV stations, KWGN, KCNC, KMGH, and KUSA. Media Watch calls the stations' local newscasts "toxic" to Denver citizens.

Its unprecedented filing also asks the FCC to require the stations to air public service announcements confessing their "unbalanced and unhealthy diet of information and its potentially harmful side-effects"; run daily prime time programs teaching "media literacy"; give mandatory education and training to their news staffs; and draw up plans to improve local election coverage.

Since 1994, Media Watch has been analyzing the nation's local TV news shows and finding them (surprise! surprise!) full of murder, mayhem, fluff, chit-chat, over-commercialization, and racial and gender stereotyping. Media Watch's lone paid staff member, executive director Paul Klite, is a former public radio talk show host, producer, and medical doctor who knows how to attract attention. Support for his group comes from some 200 contributors and a few local foundations and 200 volunteers who send in tapes of the shows Media Watch watches. Asked who does the content analysis, Klite says he does, along with three volunteers, one of whom is a Ph.D. mathematician; the other two he describes as public-interest activists.

Klite says he got encouragement and advice for his FCC action from Ralph Nader, former FCC Commissioner Nicholas Johnson, and University of Pennsylvania media guru George Gerbner — all of whom should know better than to invite in government agents to monitor TV news content. His real purpose in filing the petition, he says, was "to get people's attention." He's gotten plenty of it in Denver, in trade publications, and throughout the country. *The Boston Globe* played the story on page one.

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Of course, asking the FCC, a politically appointed agency, to serve as local censor and news editor happens to violate the Communications Act (section 326) as well as the Constitution (the First Amendment). So the FCC should, and undoubtedly will, throw out the Media Watch petition with all *un*deliberate speed. I say that even though exactly thirty years ago I organized a citizens' group to challenge the license of WPIX, a New York City station owned by the *Chicago Tribune* and the New York *Daily News*. We charged the station with gross failure to serve the needs and interests of the New York metropolitan area and with purposely falsifying and distorting its news reports. Among other egregious news practices, the station labeled old stock footage as on-the-scene reports of citizen protests in Eastern Europe, described army publicity film shot in Fort Belvoir, Virginia, as coming "via satellite from the Central Highlands of Vietnam," and identified audio reports called in from a pay phone on Forty-second street as "live from Prague." When members of WPIX's news staff complained about having to falsify the news, they were fired. But those charges involved factual issues of deliberate news falsification and distortion by a station licensee, in which the FCC has a valid interest. (After years of hearings, WPIX promised to reform, replaced its general manager and news director, settled with the challengers, and retained its license.)

Media Watch denies that its FCC petition against the Denver stations involves censorship. "No one," it says, "wants the government to regulate news content or interfere with broadcasters' First Amendment guarantees." The petition depicts the problem as really "a public health issue" of "toxic television news" that goes "beyond bad journalism." Perhaps Dr. Klite should have directed his filing to the U.S. Surgeon General.

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The assertion of Media Watch that local TV news across the nation tends to be "severely unbalanced, with excessive coverage of violent topics and trivial events" jibes with just about every other study. Last year *The Detroit News* reported that in the Motor City, "Crime and violence constitute by far the largest share of the coverage," taking up an average of 43 percent of all newscasts. The nonpartisan Center for Media and Public Affairs in Washington, D.C., recently analyzed three months of nightly local news in thirteen cities and also found that crime dominated. Crime, weather, accidents, disasters, soft news, and sports accounted for the majority of stories on the newscasts the center studied. Add in time for credits and commercials, the center noted, and you get a total of 24 minutes and 20 seconds per half-hour newscast — and that leaves just five minutes and forty seconds to cover all other "serious news" about government, health, foreign affairs, education, science, the environment . . .

Notwithstanding the fact that local TV news is generally awful throughout the nation, former FCC General Counsel Henry Geller's reaction to the Rocky Mountain petition is right on target: "I can't think of anything worse or more horrifying than the idea of asking the FCC to serve as the national nanny of the quality of the news."

Can anything short of government intervention be done to improve local TV news? It's an uphill battle. The way to fight is to keep up the barrage of healthy public criticism; organize expressions of outrage by concerned journalists and boycotts by irate viewers; expose the miscreants who do the most atrocious news job (but make sure to expose the right miscreants), and mount as much peer pressure as possible.

But at all costs, keep the government out of the newsroom. ◆

Lawrence K. Grossman is a former president of NBC News and PBS.



left: Floyd Abrams, Walter Isaacson, Mara Liasson, Richard Kaplan

THE WHITE HOUSE AND THE MEDIA

Did the press take a morbid glee in thinking it had nailed the president?

In early March, while the White House crisis was in full swing, the Columbia Graduate School of Journalism convened a trio of top journalists to discuss how well — or how dismally — the press was handling the story. Of course, a few weeks later, on April Fool's Day, Judge Susan Webber Wright dismissed the Paula Jones suit against President Clinton, and special prosecutor Kenneth Starr declared that "we will continue working to complete the investigation as expeditiously as possible." So the story — and debate over it — kept on unfolding.

The panelists at the March forum were:

- Walter Isaacson, managing editor, *Time*
- Richard N. Kaplan, president, CNN/USA
- Mara Liasson, White House correspondent, National Public Radio

Floyd Abrams, the noted First Amendment expert who is a partner in the law firm Cahill Gordon & Reindel, was the moderator. He, and members of the audience, posed the questions. Here are edited excerpts:

QUESTION: In the press's initial coverage of the Clinton crisis, there seemed to be a tone, a mood, almost an exultation, as if to say: "We've got him!" Do you feel that's true?

LIASSON: I don't think there was glee in the press corps about "getting" the president. The story was so completely bizarre. What we were reporting caused the president's polls to go up, because the public heard people like ABC News's George Will saying that Clinton would be out by the end of the week. And people said: "He will? I don't want that to happen." They were offended by the overkill of the coverage. They resented newspeople on TV telling *them* — who had elected the president — that he'd have to resign. "Hey, wait a minute! Aren't we the voters? Don't we decide that?"

So there was this incredible backlash against the press, against the pundits. Then the White House got another heap of help when Ken Starr started doing stupid things. It didn't feel good to the public. Something wasn't right there. The best thing that ever happened to the White House was the press's overreaction and Starr's bumbling. Just imagine if the press had been more circumspect and not rushed to judgment, and just kept our coverage to a minimum. Starr would have been able to do his work quietly and without so much attention, and President Clinton would be in more trouble than he is today.

The problem with talking about "the press" is that it isn't one organism. It's a herd, an unruly herd of news organizations who don't all get together in the morning and decide what to cover.

GARY FABIANO/SIPA

KAPLAN: The journalists who went most over the line were commentators, not beat reporters. In years past, when there was far less news on broadcast TV and no all-news cable channels, there were few commentators except for Eric Sevareid, and I shudder to think what he'd make of all this. But we now have commentators all over the place. We get a lot of people from op-ed pages, and they sit there and have no problem convicting the president. And we say, well, that's okay, they're commentators. That's their job. It's a tough role for people like Sam Donaldson. He is told by management at ABC News in their wisdom that on Sunday mornings he's supposed to give his opinion. And he does. And he's sometimes wrong. He's rarely wrong when he's a reporter.

LIASSON: One problem is that the public sees no difference between commentators and reporters. Another is that there are now so many channels to fill. There are too many news programs on the air. So many cable channels. There's just too much time to fill, and too many reporters chasing too few sources.

KAPLAN: We would sit there and get a lot of pressure from some of our affiliates, and from some other areas inside CNN, because we were not going with stories that other newscasters were airing. They were saying, "You're getting beaten on this." And it soon became apparent that it was good to be beaten on a lot of these stories.

QUESTION: An NBC-*Wall Street Journal* poll says that about half the people in the country think the president is guilty as charged, about a quarter don't think so, and another quarter aren't sure. Shouldn't all journalists be in the "not sure" group?

KAPLAN: Journalists are supposed to be in the "not sure" group all the time on everything.

ISAACSON: In the first week of this story, my boss, Norman Pearlstine, said that in journalism, your two goals are to get it first and to get it right. And in this story, you ought to pay a little bit more attention to getting it right than getting it first.

QUESTION: Still, don't you think the public perceived that the press was really enjoying covering this very hot, sexy story, and that helped turn the public on to it?

LIASSON: I had an interview with the president the day the story broke, as did Jim Lehrer and Morton Kondracke, and I can tell you it was awful. I didn't feel like, "Wow, this is great. I get to ask the president about whether he had sex with Monica Lewinsky. No. I thought the whole thing was awful in every way you could imagine, for the presidency, for the American public, for journalism.

KAPLAN: There is no responsible journalist who took one degree of joy from any of this. I sympathize with Mara who had to sit with the president that day. You don't say to yourself, "This is my best moment." You don't want to have a statue in the lobby of your network commemorating great coverage of the Lewinsky scandal. Especially when it could have a devastating effect on the republic.

ISAACSON: I agree totally. I will say that the adrenaline starts to flow when a story like this happens, and you jump all over it. You get excited. Being so caught up in the frenzy of the competitive chase is problematic for this business because it forces you, especially in the age of the Internet, to see how fast you can get out with something. It's like asking if the hounds are happy that they're about to decimate a fox. The hounds are acting on instinct, and so are we. But we are certainly not happy.

> "The whole thing was awful in every way, for the public, the presidency, and for journalism"

QUESTION: Do you and your colleagues ever feel ashamed because there was so much published about the alleged semen-stained dress?

ISAACSON: Absolutely. We, like everybody else the first week, said that Lewinsky bragged about the dress. It's on the tapes. I don't know that the dress exists. I also don't know that it never existed. We did a three-page story the second week of this thing that I called our three-page correction. We went through how we got the story, explaining who first said there was a dress, who reported it, what types of sources there likely were for all this reporting, what Bill Ginsburg said. We had little dotted lines that showed the outline of a dress, which basically said to the public, "Don't believe, necessarily, that there is a dress, but here's why it got into the lore." That's a long way of saying, yes, you really feel bad about it, and you try to explain how it all happened.

QUESTION: Isn't there a problem that local news programs report a lot of news they've never been within two thousand miles of?

KAPLAN: With all due respect, local news really is a pain. When I was at ABC, we had problems caused by various local stations reporting things that ended up being attributed to ABC News. There are a lot of places where local news is pretty damned good, and other places where it isn't as good. People do not make a distinction between the networks and local news. And some of those stations are quite irresponsible about what they report.

QUESTION: We now have a public prosecutor who takes the view that criticizing him in the press is obstruction of justice. Is the press afraid to come out against Starr with the same bitterness and eagerness that they've attacked the president with?

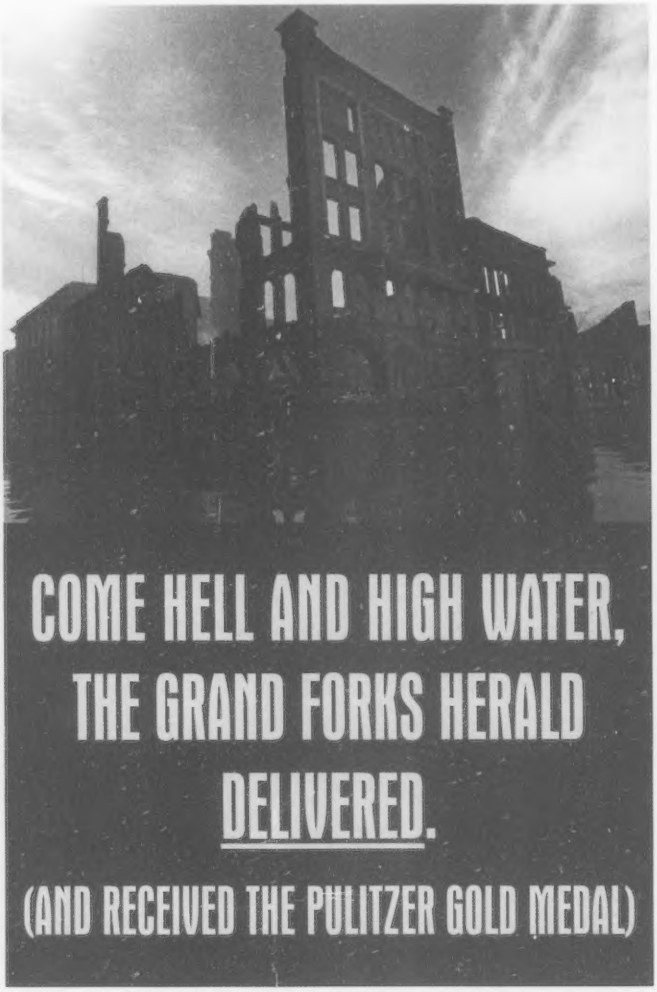
ISAACSON: The special prosecutor's office has a lot of information that could be useful. And there certainly may be some reporters who think that — well, let me pull my punch a little bit because I'm hoping to get what's in the proffers, in the statements of the witnesses.

QUESTION: Many print journalists are enjoying a secondary career as pundits on television, since there are so many news programs now with so much time to fill. One thing that upsets the public is for a print reporter to be asked if the president is going to, or should, resign. Should there be some limits about what is appropriate for a print reporter to be saying on television?

ISAACSON: Print reporters really love to be on TV. And in order to be on TV, you've got to be very opinionated at times — to provoke controversy, and have great answers. You've got to go further than you should go. Should the president resign? The right answer is: "It's not up to me to say." But they go for the sound bites because that's what you're told you're supposed to do on TV. So we've had a lot of discussions at our magazine. Who's going to go on the air? How far are you going to go? That sort of thing. If any of our reporters went on the air and gave an answer to whether the president should resign, I'd be really annoyed. But yes, there's this pressure that all print reporters should be provocative pundits on TV. It's not a great envelope to push. ◆



When the Red River overflowed its banks, it happened in a hurry. Saturday morning's editions were rolling off the press when officials gave the Herald staff 15 minutes to evacuate the building. Not long thereafter, the reel room was under water, and the presses were caked with mud. The next day, two of the Herald's three buildings, including the newsroom, burned to the ground. You know the expression, come hell or high water? Well, come hell and high water, the Grand Forks Herald never missed a day of publication. Even as they were flooded out of their homes, even as some didn't know where their relatives were, the men and women of the Grand Forks Herald played a central role in keeping the community connected. The newspaper was a lifeline to reestablishing stability; it provided essential information so that the city could rebuild. This is the kind of work that makes the newspaper business precious. It's at the heart and soul of why we love what we do – and why we are so especially gratified to salute the people of the Grand Forks Herald. The Pulitzer Gold Medal for Meritorious Public Service is recognition of their achievement, and we celebrate it with them.



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An American Nile on PBS

WABC-TV, New York
Room 104: The Overcrowding Crisis

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A program of the Alfred I. duPont Awards Foundation administered by the Columbia University Graduate School of Journalism

The New York Times Wins Three 1998 Pulitzer Prizes

Linda Greenhouse, Supreme Court correspondent for The New York Times, has won the 1998 Pulitzer Prize for beat reporting. She was honored for her ability, often under deadline pressure, to report the Court's work and its significance with sophistication and a sense of history.



Based in Washington, Ms. Greenhouse has covered the Court for nearly 20 years, reporting on the institution as well as its decisions, describing and anticipating trends in constitutional law. The dramatic close of the term in June 1997, when the Court issued an extraordinary series of opinions in its final week, was perhaps the ultimate test of a beat reporter under pressure. With exceptional clarity and nuance, Ms. Greenhouse reported the Court's decisions on assisted suicide; on a decency test for material on the Internet; on the Brady Law and its import for Federal-state relations, and on Congress's exceeding its power in legislating new protections for the practice of religion. She also wrote the obituary of Justice William J. Brennan Jr., conveying the spirit of the man as well as his impact on American law.

Michiko Kakutani, the senior book critic of The New York Times, has won the 1998 Pulitzer Prize for criticism. She was honored for an extensive body of writing in 1997, in which she reviewed the year's many major works in essays that were fearless and authoritative.

No more demanding test for a book reviewer could be devised than 1997, when publishers brought out important and controversial novels by Thomas Pynchon, Don DeLillo, John Updike, Philip Roth and Norman Mailer, and major nonfiction works by writers including Henry Louis Gates and Gabriel García Márquez. In reviews of literary quality themselves, Ms. Kakutani not only brought readers the news of these important books, but helped set the terms for much of the public conversation about them. None of her pieces were shy about taking a position, but none fell back on what she or others had thought in the past. In each case she reviewed the book, not the reputation, with a critical but sympathetic intelligence that projected itself imaginatively into the mind and work of others.

The New York Times has won the 1998 Pulitzer Prize for reporting on international affairs. The newspaper was honored for a series of articles on the effects of drug corruption in Mexico, written by Sam Dillon and Julia Preston of The Times's Mexico City bureau; Tim Golden, a national correspondent, and Craig Pyes, a freelance journalist.

In 1997, The Times undertook something almost unheard-of in foreign correspondence: a major investigation of a foreign country, one vital to United States security. Drawing on classified intelligence documents and interviews with key officials in both Mexico and the United States, the series of articles explored how Mexico's drug barons had acquired the money and power to subvert an entire nation, bribing officials for protection and having Mexican journalists who dared to report on them either prosecuted for criminal libel or killed. The first article, about two Mexican governors who were cooperating with drug traffickers in their states, resulted in criminal libel complaints against The Times (eventually dismissed by Mexico's Attorney General). Other articles examined the short, violent life of a foot soldier in one of Mexico's most violent drug gangs, and the career of Mexico's top antidrug official, who was accused of working with his country's most powerful trafficker. The series had a significant effect not only in the United States but also in Mexico, where the press faces legal constraints and the threat of violence in pursuing this kind of investigation.



Left to right: Tim Golden, Sam Dillon, Julia Preston, Stephen Engelberg (series editor) and Craig Pyes.

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JOURNALISM

PUBLIC SERVICE

- Awarded to the *Grand Forks* (N.D.) *Herald* for its sustained and informative coverage, vividly illustrated with photographs, that helped hold its community together in the wake of flooding, a blizzard and fire that devastated much of the city, including the newspaper plant itself.
- Also nominated as finalists: the *Los Angeles Times* and *The Seattle Times.*

BREAKING NEWS REPORTING

- Awarded to the *Los Angeles Times* staff for its comprehensive coverage of a botched bank robbery and subsequent police shoot-out in Noth Hollywood
- Also nominated as finalists: John Dennis Harrigan, publisher of *The News and Sentinel,* a Colebrook, N.H. weekly and Mike McAlary of the *Daily News,* New York, N.Y.

INVESTIGATIVE REPORTING

- Awarded to Gary Cohn and Will Englund of *The Baltimore Sun* for their compelling series on the international shipbreaking industry that revealed the dangers posed to workers and the environment when discarded ships are dismantled.
- Also nominated as finalists: Lisa Getter, Jeff Leen and Gail Epstein of *The Miami Herald* and the *St. Petersburg Times* staff.

EXPLANATORY REPORTING

- Awarded to Paul Salopek of the *Chicago Tribune* for his enlightening profile of the Human Genome Diversity Project, which seeks to chart the genetic relationship among all people.
- Also nominated as finalists: Linda Greenhouse of *The New York Times* and the *St. Petersburg Times* staff.

BEAT REPORTING

- Awarded to Linda Greenhouse of *The New York Times* for her consistently illuminating coverage of the United States Supreme Court.
- Nominated as finalists: Keith Bradsher of *The New York Times,* Jason DeParle of *The New York Times,* and Laurie Garrett of *Newsday.*

NATIONAL REPORTING

- Awarded to Russell Carollo and Jeff Nesmith of the *Dayton Daily News* for their reporting that disclosed dangerous flaws and mismanagement in the military health care system and prompted reforms.
- Also nominated as finalists: Douglas Frantz of *The New York Times* and David Wood of Newhouse News Service, Washington, D.C.

INTERNATIONAL REPORTING

- Awarded to *The New York Times* staff for its revealing series that profiled the corrosive effects of drug corruption in Mexico.
- Also nominated as finalists: Nicholas D. Kristof of *The New York Times* and John Pomfret of *The Washington Post.*

FEATURE WRITING

- Awarded to Thomas French of the *St. Petersburg Times* for his detailed and compassionate narrative portrait of a mother and two daughters slain on a Florida vacation, and the three-year investigation into their murders.
- Also nominated as finalists: Steve Giegerich of the *Asbury Park Press* and J.R. Moehringer of the *Los Angeles Times.*

The Pulitzer Prizes

Awarded by Columbia University on the recommendation of the Pulitzer Prize Board

JOURNALISM'S HIGHEST HONOR.

The Times staff has won a 1998 Pulitzer Prize in the breaking news category for coverage of the North Hollywood bank shootout on February 28, 1997.



Times photographer Clarence Williams has won a 1998 Pulitzer Prize in the feature photography category for his riveting photos that ran in last November's "Orphans of Addiction" series.

Everyone at the Los Angeles Times is very proud to have won not just one, but two, Pulitzer Prizes this year. The Pulitzer is journalism's highest honor, and The Times has now earned 22 of them.

But we would like to take this opportunity to reflect on the real meaning behind the quality journalism we publish every day in The Times.

While winning Pulitzer Prizes is great in itself, producing world-class journalism is really all about serving our readers.

When photographer Clarence Williams shot his riveting photos that ran in last November's "Orphans of Addiction" series, he stunningly documented a bleak reality that was previously invisible to many of us. He was shining a light in dark places, something that the best journalists simply must do. And by shining that light, he and reporter Sonia Nazario helped prompt a sweeping review of agencies that are entrusted with protecting young children. They also helped bring changes to the families they profiled.

When our team of reporters, photographers and editors gave front-line reporting on last year's North Hollywood shootout, they brought context and meaning to a frightening event. And then they followed up with hard-hitting reports on the dangers posed by so many assault rifles in the hands of criminals.

Connecting with our readers – with their hearts as well as their minds – is what we set out to do every day at The Times. Through honest and compelling journalism such as this Pulitzer Prize-winning material, we want to help readers better understand our world and, by doing so, make a difference in our community.

So, on the occasion of winning these two prestigious awards, we thank our readers for making The Times their paper, and for inspiring us to always give our best.

Mark H. Willes
Publisher

Michael Parks
Editor

Los Angeles Times
Get the story. Get the Times.

COMMENTARY

- Awarded to Mike McAlary of the *Daily News,* New York, N.Y., for his coverage of the brutalization of a Haitian immigrant by police officers at a Brooklyn stationhouse.
- Nominated as finalists: Bob Greene of the *Chicago Tribune,* Robert J. Samuelson of *The Washington Post* Writers Group, and Patricia Smith of The Boston Globe.

CRITICISM

- Awarded to Michiko Kakutani of *The New York Times* for her passionate, intelligent writing on books and contemporary literature.
- Also nominated as finalists: Dorothy Rabinowitz of *The Wall Street Journal* and Peter Rainer of *New Times Los Angeles.*

EDITORIAL WRITING

- Awarded to Bernard L. Stein of *The Riverdale* (N.Y.) *Press,* a weekly, for his gracefully-written editorials on politics and other issues affecting New York City residents.
- Also nominated as finalists: George B. Pyle of *The Salina* (Kan.) *Journal* and Clint Talbott of the *Colorado Daily,* Boulder.

EDITORIAL CARTOONING

- Awarded to Stephen P. Breen of the *Asbury Park Press,* Neptune, N. J.
- Nominated as finalists: Paul Conrad of the *Los Angeles Times,* Jeff MacNelly of the *Chicago Tribune,* and Joel Pett of the *Lexington* (Ky.) *Herald-Leader.*

SPOT NEWS PHOTOGRAPHY

- Awarded to Martha Rial of the *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette* for her life-affirming portraits of survivors of the conflicts in Rwanda and Burundi.
- Also nominated as finalists: Jean-Marc Bouju of the Associated Press and the *Grand Forks* (N.D.) *Herald* photo staff.

FEATURE PHOTOGRAPHY

- Awarded to Clarence Williams of the *Los Angeles Times* for his powerful images documenting the plight of young children with parents addicted to alcohol and drugs.
- Also nominated as finalists: Allan Detrich of Block News Alliance and Joseph V. Stefanchik of *The Dallas Morning News.*

LETTERS

FICTION

"American Pastoral" by Philip Roth (Houghton Mifflin).

DRAMA

"How I Learned to Drive" by Paula Vogel

HISTORY

"Summer for the Gods: The Scopes Trial and America's Continuing Debate Over Science and Religion" by Edward J. Larson (BasicBooks).

BIOGRAPHY

"Personal History" by Katharine Graham (Alfred A. Knopf)

POETRY

"Black Zodiac" by Charles Wright (Farrar, Straus and Giroux).

GENERAL NON-FICTION

"Guns, Germs, and Steel: The Fates of Human Societies" by Jared Diamond (W. W. Norton)

MUSIC

"String Quartet No. 2, (musica instrumentalis)" by Aaron Jay Kernis, premiered on January 10, 1998, at Merkin Concert Hall, New York City by the Lark Quartet

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1998 Pulitzer Prize Award Winner

Congratulations to Gary Cohn and Will Englund for their 1998 Pulitzer Prize-winning series — *The Shipbreakers*

The gripping three-part series ***The Shipbreakers*** by Gary Cohn and Will Englund has earned The Sun the 1998 Pulitzer Prize for Investigative Reporting.

The Shipbreakers series details how poor, untrained workers tear apart U.S. Navy vessels in scrapyards where safety and environmental rules are regularly ignored. A year-long investigation, the series describes the toll in worker injuries and death as well as the ongoing damage to the environment. As a result of the series, the U.S. House of Representatives has convened special hearings on the practices of the shipbreaking industry and the U.S. Navy has halted plans to send ships to the Third World for scrapping.

The Shipbreakers has also won the Ninth Annual Selden Ring Award for Investigative Journalism; Sigma Delta Chi's first prize for investigative reporting and the 1997 Investigative Reporters and Editors (IRE) Award. Along with photographer Perry Thorsvik, Cohn and Englund also won the George Polk Award for environmental reporting.



Gary Cohn



Will Englund



Perry Thorsvik



THE BALTIMORE SUN

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Texas Monthly
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REPORTING

Harper's Magazine *(2 nominations)*
The New Yorker
Rolling Stone *(2 nominations)*

FEATURE WRITING

Harper's Magazine
The New Yorker
New York
Outside
Sports Illustrated

PUBLIC INTEREST

The Atlantic Monthly
The New Yorker
Reason *(2 nominations)*
U. S. News & World Report
Worth

DESIGN

Bloomberg Personal
Entertainment Weekly
Fast Company
Garden Design
Martha Stewart Living
Wired

PHOTOGRAPHY

DoubleTake
Martha Stewart Living
Saveur
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FICTION

The Atlantic Monthly
DoubleTake
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National Magazine Awards

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First Amendment Watch

by Ellen Alderman

Gagging Jurors — *After* the Trial

A sensational trial. Eight days of deliberations and the jury renders a controversial verdict. On the courthouse steps one juror issues an inflammatory statement about the deliberations. The crowd of reporters immediately runs to the judge for permission to ask the juror a question.

This is the oddball scene envisioned by a recent ruling from federal district court judge Sarah Vance following a highly publicized criminal trial in New Orleans. Before dismissing the jury, Judge Vance declared that no one could interview the jurors about their deliberations without a special order from the court. Any reporter who tried to ask a juror about deliberations without permission risked being held in contempt, proving that while the trial-as-spectacle standard set by O.J. and others may be weird, attempts to restore some dignity to the process can be even weirder.

In the trial that produced Judge Vance's extraordinary ruling, two powerhouse former state senators were accused of accepting bribes to influence Louisiana's controversial video poker industry. Another defendant was a well-known Roman Catholic deacon, and witnesses included a former governor. In short, it was the kind of high-profile, high-stakes trial that can turn a courtroom into a soundstage and participants into celebrities, willing or not.

Judge Vance was determined to keep the case inside the courtroom and the spectacle out. In early proceedings she chastised a participant for speaking with reporters and warned, "If I have to issue a gag order and contempt citations to keep this case from being tried in the press, I will."

But Judge Vance did not issue a gag order on the parties during the trial; she issued one on the jurors and press when it was over.

◆

Gag orders *during* trial have been issued, and contested, for decades, pitting the right to a fair trial against the right to a free press. But it is highly unusual for a judge to issue sweeping post-trial restrictions that aim to control, in perpetuity, both the jurors and anyone wishing to interview them. In fact, a previous post-trial gag order in Judge Vance's circuit had been struck down, in part because it covered discussions of the verdict as well as deliberations, and applied to jurors' friends and family in addition to the press.

So when the New Orleans *Times-Picayune* and the Baton Rouge *Advocate* filed suit claiming Vance's order violated the First Amendment, the judge defended her decision by emphasizing that it applied to deliberations only, and that the jurors could be interviewed about other matters such as their "general impressions" of the trial. As for deliberations, jurors remained free to talk with friends, family, and associates and could even issue public statements. They just could not be "interviewed" about the deliberations. But it seems that in trying to narrow her ruling to make it constitutional, Judge Vance created an unworkable system that does not even resolve the quite legitimate concerns raised by media-soaked cases.

◆

First, Judge Vance said she wanted to "provide jurors with privacy and protection from harassment after trial." But if journalists may aggressively pursue interviews as long as they don't ask about "deliberations," it is hard to see how the ruling protects jurors from the press. Second, Judge Vance wanted to "ensure fair trials in the future by protecting free speech within the deliberation room." She said that if confidentiality of jury deliberations cannot be protected, there will be a chilling effect on deliberations and some people will try to avoid jury service altogether. Again, this is an understandable fear in the post-O.J. era, but one that does not seem to be addressed by the ruling. If jurors may make public statements about the deliberations and speak freely to friends, family, and associates who may, in turn, be interviewed by the press, confidentiality is hardly well guarded.

Then there is the practical problem. "Absent a special order by me, no juror may be interviewed," Judge Vance wrote. How exactly would that work? If several newspapers want to ask about the deliberations, do they petition the judge? May the judge say okay to the *Picayune* and no to the *Advocate*? Yes to *The New York Times* and no to *The Wall Street Journal*? Does the judge then act as a super-editor, reviewing questions in advance?

All of this would be a somewhat comical footnote to one criminal trial except that in October, the Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals unanimously upheld Judge Vance's order, making it legal not only in Louisiana, but also in Mississippi and Texas. Recently, the appeals court also refused the press's request for a rehearing, lending heft to the district court's wobbly order. The Baton Rouge *Advocate*, at least, plans to appeal to the U.S. Supreme Court.

In the meantime, one of the second highest courts in the land has declared that the threat to the administration of justice in sensational trials is so great that it justifies the extraordinary gag order. Indeed the view from the bench is the same as elsewhere: trial as spectacular entertainment has become so alarming that something must be done. But for the reporter trying to cover a trial, Judge Vance's order falls into the category of real problem, surreal solution. ◆

Alderman is an attorney and co-author, with Caroline Kennedy, of In Our Defense: The Bill of Rights in Action, *and* The Right to Privacy.



REVEALING

The tools are now available in the digital age for journalists to dig deep and root out shenanigans in the nation's state capitals, which long have gone under-reported

BY CHARLES LEWIS

Imagine a newspaper doggedly investigating its state legislature for more than two years, publishing five separate series of articles totaling 130,000 words in thirty-five front-page stories. Such persistence and follow-up by *The Indianapolis Star* and *News* stands out in the notoriously fickle news business.

Imagine several statewide news organizations, all independently investigating their state legislature, their banner headline stories all running on the same, mutually agreed-upon day. Such an unusual collaboration in such a competitive industry has recently occurred in Indiana, Illinois, and Virginia. In all cases, the public got far more information about its elected officials and their legislative decisions than ever before.

Many state capital reporters have long been guilty — as Rob Gurwitt wrote in CJR two years ago: "Comes The Devolution," May/June 1996 — "of pack journalism, of uninspired coverage, of failing to dig beneath the surface to explain how power gets exercised." Worse, many news organizations — especially small newspapers and most TV stations — do not even attempt to provide consistent coverage of governors and state legislatures. But with the devolution of power and money from Washington to the states the public needs to know what its state lawmakers are doing and, now more than ever before, why. Anybody with an Internet connection can do so in states with up-to-date electronic databanks.

In this digital age, citizens in nearly two-thirds of the states still must visit election board offices to find and examine records of campaign contributions to their state legislators. While many states have computerized their records and some have even passed laws requiring electronic filing of campaign contributions by political candidates, records in dozens of states exist only on paper. This contrasts sharply with Washington, D.C., where ten years of congressional and presidential campaign contribution records are accessible from the Federal Election Commission for a small fee. The agency makes copies of current reports available on its Web site (www.fec.gov).

Even though many states enacted disclosure laws around the time of the Watergate scandal in the 1970s, too often the sunshine has been illusory. Most citizens, including reporters, haven't been willing or able to drive to and from their state capital to peruse records. Meanwhile, private interests sometimes computerize government records and charge clients for access to them.

In more than half the country, an enterprising soul who actually makes it to the promised land of those public, paper records discovers that there are thousands and thousands of forms, replete with names and numbers, some handwritten, with contributor names sometimes not listed alphabetically, addresses and occupations often omitted. Enforcement by state election authorities of nondisclosure shenanigans is virtually nonexistent. It would take days or weeks to ascertain precisely how much campaign money was given to state politicians by, let's say, the tobacco industry or the Teamsters union.

There has been very little enterprising journalism in the majority of states about the influence of special-interest money on state legislative decisions. In Indiana, the chamber of commerce maintained a database into which the chamber entered each contribution to lawmakers. That information wasn't generally available to journalists — so business interests could analyze contribution trends, but newspeople couldn't. Reporter Greg Weaver of *The Evansville Courier* developed his own computerized database of contributions to state legislators and wrote an impressive series of stories in 1992. His trove, too, was proprietary and not open to his fellow journalists around the state. (Evansville is off in a corner of Indi-

Lobbyists cluster to compare notes at the House



INDIANAPOLIS CAPITOL BUILDING/BRUCE COLEMAN, INC./RUTH CHIN

Charles Lewis is founder and executive director, Center for Public Integrity.

STATE SECRETS

ana, and most Hoosiers did not see the coverage.) By the mid-nineties, as the state legislature had become more important and powerful, journalists still had no way of analyzing who was contributing how much to whom, while businesses did.

In late 1994 and early 1995, the nonprofit Center for Public Integrity (www.publicintegrity.org), of which I am executive director, forged a collaborative relationship with the *Indianapolis Star* and *News* and roughly a dozen news organizations and eight political scientists. Interns from Notre Dame and DePauw University keypunched 19,000 state campaign records from paper into a computer database at the center's offices in Washington under the direction of the research group's Diane Renzulli. In collaboration with the Center for Responsive Politics (a research group specializing in the role money plays in congressional elections and actions), and with editing assistance by *Star* and *News* staffers (and funding from the Joyce Foundation which allowed the center to provide the information free of charge to consortium members and the public), the database was created. The participants met in Indiana to discuss the project and to set a date, January 14, 1996, when news organizations could begin running stories using that hoard of data. The database was put on the Internet for public use two weeks later.

In late January and the first half of February 1996 — a year after the project had begun — four news organizations published series, blanketing the state with investigative coverage of the Indiana legislature. WTHR-TV, the NBC-affiliate in Indianapolis, ran "Legislators for Sale" every day for a week; reporter Roger Harvey asked one lawmaker on-camera what contributors expect to get when they cumulatively contribute $230,000 to help elect somebody to a $12,000 a-year job. *The Evansville Courier* and the Fort Wayne *Journal Gazette* also did stories.

But most remarkable was the *Indianapolis Star* and *News*, which ran a hard-hitting, five-day series, "Statehouse Sellout: How Special Interests Hijacked the Legislature." No one was more shocked than the lawmakers themselves — how could the traditionally conservative newspaper, published by former Vice President Dan Quayle's family, write such things about the GOP-controlled legislature? For months, assistant managing editor for projects Mark Rochester led an energetic team — reporters Suzanne McBride, Linda Graham Caleca, Janet Williams, and Greg Weaver, computer-assisted reporting coordinator Mark Nichols, and photographer Frank Espich.

The newspaper reported that "an unprecedented coalition of about forty big-business interests persuaded a sympathetic Republican majority to pass a

nber in Indiana, where news organizations pooled their resources to examine legislators' campaign contributions alongside their voting records



FRANK ESPICH

'wish list' of favorable laws in 1995." Examples: making it harder to win product-liability cases; lowering wages for workers on public construction projects; ending the collection of money by teachers unions from non-union teachers.

The paper revealed that candidates with more campaign money than their opponents won 82 percent of the time. Of the $7.8 million that statehouse candidates raised in 1994, $35.9 million came from special-interest groups, notably the Indiana Manufacturers Association, the Indiana State Teachers Association, and the Indiana Trial Lawyers, as well as from two political parties. The coverage included front-page stories of lobbyists buttonholing lawmakers, and egregious personal conflicts of interest by House and Senate leaders. Examples:

- Republican Senate president pro tem Robert D. Garton earned some of his income by making motivational speeches to special-interest contributors.
- Republican House speaker Paul Mannweiler appeared on a videotape explaining a recently passed labor law. In the video, distributed by a special-interest group, Mannweiler advertised his legal expertise and gave his firm's phone number for people seeking help in interpreting how the legislation affects their business.

***Indianapolis Star* and *News* reporter Suzanne McBride interviews Republican state legislator Michael Young**



PATRICIA EVANS

- Democratic minority floor leader John R. Gregg was paid legal fees to represent several southern Indiana coal companies with business interests before the General Assembly.
- Democratic Representative Charlie Brown earned a $29,000 consulting fee from Northern Indiana Public Service Co. before voting for utility legislation pushed by the company.

For the first time, Indiana citizens were reading articles of breadth and detail about their politicians and the forces supporting them. Within days, nearly 2,000 people contacted the *Star* and *News*, angry about what they had read — the largest response to any story or series in the paper's history.

State legislators exploded over the exposé. When a *Star* and *News* reporter showed Senate president Garton the stacks of angry reader mail, he harrumphed: "What gives them the right to question us? What gives them the right to question our integrity?" The reporter observed that citizens elect lawmakers and believe that they are supposed to work for the public. Weeks later, the legislature voted to computerize campaign records and place them online (although it took lawmakers many months to authorize the necessary money). A commission was created to study ways to improve the state's campaign finance system.

A hard-hitting series described a "statehouse sellout": how special interests in Indiana hijacked the legislature

The Center for Public Integrity developed a second database, this time from 1995-96 campaign contribution records, and the *Star* and *News* and other consortium organizations ran another round of stories about the state legislature in early 1997. Then acting alone, the newspaper did a third, computer-assisted "Statehouse Sellout" series last August, focusing on campaign expenses. Reporters Williams and McBride found that about 40 percent of legislators' campaign "costs" — such as wedding gifts, football tickets and exclusive club memberships (paid for at least partly by special interests) have little or nothing to do with running for public office. They also found that only 20 cents of every campaign dollar spent goes to media advertising.

This January, the Rochester-led team unloaded a fourth series (subsequently, there was a fifth), juxtaposing campaign contribution records with another computer analysis of all 262 pieces of legislation that passed both chambers of the legislature. Among the findings: more than half the legislation sent to Democratic Governor Frank O'Bannon for signing was written by lawmakers who had received contributions from the interests directly affected by those bills:

- Health care interests contributed $108,000 to sponsors of twenty-three health care bills that became law.
- Environmental interests contributed $98,000 to sponsors of fifteen environmental bills that became law.
- Insurance interests contributed $96,000 to sponsors of twelve insurance bills that became law.
- Education interests contributed $58,000 to sponsors of seven education bills that became law.
- Liquor interests contributed $30,000 to sponsors of eight liquor bills that became law.

Once again, reader mail poured in: more than 2,400 people wrote or called the paper, angry over what they had read.

"Our readers are very passionate about this," says *Indianapolis Star* and *News* executive editor Frank Caperton, a reporter and editor for thirty-six years at a half-dozen Florida, Virginia, and Indiana papers. It was his decision to commit the newspaper to the project, and a fifth series was published in February. The idea all along was "to do something on behalf of our readers," says Caperton. Asked what advice he'd give other editors around the nation who might want to investigate their state legislatures, Caperton says, "Patience, patience, patience! . . . You have to make a commitment and say, 'We're in this to represent the public interest and to showcase these problems until the system and the public deal with them.'"

In addition, says Caperton, "this project has helped us to realize the potential of computer-assisted reporting." Reporter Williams has been promoted to assistant city editor in charge of all government coverage. "My goal," she says, "is to use [computerized campaign finance] data in more of our reporting."

In Illinois, a state with five times more campaign finance records than Indiana and a more infamous reputation for tolerated corruption, a comparable coalition poked into the statewide money-and-politics issue. Illinois has one of the weakest campaign finance laws in the nation: there are no individual campaign contribution limits; unlimited sums of

money are transferable between lawmakers; former legislators can pocket leftover campaign cash. The State Board of Elections records are computerized, but they are not coded according to economic interests. Thus, users can't figure out how much health care interests, or labor unions, or teachers contributed to the General Assembly.

The Center for Public Integrity, working closely with Kent Redfield, a University of Illinois political scientist, provided databases with more than 100,000 records of 1995-96 campaign contributions and expenses, plus a confidential analysis, to no fewer than fourteen news organizations. Last October 5, every consortium participant began running stories: the *Chicago Tribune* ("Ante Up: The Springfield Money Game"), Tribune Broadcasting's WGN and CLTV News, the *Belleville News-Democrat* ("Passing the Bucks"), the Bloomington *Pantagraph*, the Carbondale *Southern Illinoisan* ("Follow the Leaders: Campaign Financing in Illinois"), the Champaign-Urbana *News-Gazette* ("The Money Quest"), the Decatur *Herald & Review* ("The Money Game"), the Kankakee *Daily Journal*, the Kewanee *Star Courier*, the Peoria *Journal Star* ("Running on Money"), the *Quad-City Times*, the Quincy *Herald Whig*, and the Springfield *State Journal Register* ("Running on Money"). That week, those newspapers produced approximately thirty front-page stories about the role of money in the state legislature.

How vulnerable is the Illinois politician to the lure of money? As the *Chicago Tribune* reported, the four Republican and Democratic leaders of the state legislature, controlled, through various committees, $24.74 million in campaign contributions raised in 1995-96, up from $15.42 million in the 1993-94 cycle. The Peoria *Journal Star* reported that lawmakers spent $200,000 of their campaign contributions on entertainment and sporting events, including $90,000 for tickets to Chicago Bulls games. House Republican leader Lee Daniels spent more on Bulls tickets than anyone else, $30,000. His spokesman, Brian Timpone, explained: "It's just like any business that entertains clients."

After the initial coverage in October, the Illinois databases were made available to the public on various Web sites, and a letter was sent to members of the Illinois Press Association alerting them to this new resource.

In Virginia — one of those backward states that still uses paper records — it's extremely difficult for the public to "follow the money" from various interests to the state legislature. So, five newspapers — the Newport News *Daily Press*, the *Richmond Times-Dispatch*, the *Roanoke Times*, *The Virginian-Pilot*, and *The Washington Post* — pooled their money to develop a computer database of campaign contributions to the 1997 gubernatorial candidates. Two-thirds of the project's funding came from media organizations and other sources listed on the Virginia Public Access Project Web site (www.crp.org/vpap).

David M. Poole, head of the project (which explores how computers can help money-in-politics research), along with Robert Holsworth of Virginia Commonwealth University's Center for Public Policy, computerized approximately 40,000 records for the consortium. Most remarkable, about a week after statewide candidates reported their campaign contributions to the Virginia Board of Elections, the newspapers received computer files that coded contributors according to their economic interests, revealing names of the top donors to each candidate, and the industries that gave the most to all candidates.

The joint effort helped persuade the Republican and Democratic gubernatorial candidates and other statewide office seekers to make their contribution data available electronically, eliminating the laborious task of entering each contribution into a database. A searchable version of the database was placed on the Internet (www.crp.org), and related information given to weekly newspapers and small dailies statewide via the Virginia Public Access Project.


THE INDIANAPOLIS STAR

MENTORING

Possibilities endless in campaign spending

Clinton to christen line-item veto toda

SMALL TOWNS ON DISPLAY

Sides told not

THE INDIANAPOLIS STAR

Campaign expenses padded with perks

UPS talks break off; long fight expected

AGAINST ALL ODDS

In its August 1997 series, the *Star* disclosed that about 40 percent of the $7.2 million lawmakers spent in 1995 and 1996 went to expenses having little or nothing to do with actual campaigning: gifts, golf tournaments, memberships in exclusive clubs — all made possible by the endless flow of special-interest money to office-holders

As in Indiana and Illinois, the number and type of stories written from the database varied greatly. Says Poole: "The biggest obstacle though, has been reporters' unfamiliarity with computer databases. None of the five newspapers had a single reporter assigned to the political beat who knew how to use FoxPro and Access [software programs] . . . . As a result, the newspapers have done a poor job of weaving the database into the fabric of their daily coverage."

But the fact remains that millions of readers in Virginia, Illinois, and Indiana are



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more informed than ever before about their state politics because of computer-assisted reporting and the creativity, perseverance, and commitment of dozens of news organizations. These models are being replicated elsewhere in the U.S. For example, thirty New York news organizations, including *The New York Times*, *Newsday*, *The Buffalo News*, WNBC-TV, and The Associated Press, have joined forces to create a database of contributions to statewide and state legislature candidates in 1998. Poole is working with the consortium to computerize these records for in-depth stories for this year's elections.

Not every news organization may choose to collaborate with its competitors or with universities or nonprofit research organizations. Recent years have seen a number of outstanding "solo" investigations of state officials by such newspapers as *The Boston Globe*, the *San Jose Mercury News* ("Legislature for Sale: How Big Money Rules Lawmaking in Sacramento," January 1995) and the *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel* ("Money and Influence Inside the Thompson Administration," November 1997). In January 1996 *The Tampa Tribune* did a fascinating analysis of personal conflicts of interest by members of the Florida legislature. Reporter Louis Lavelle found that eighty-four of the 157 legislators who sat on committees, including the chairmen or vice chairmen of twelve committees — 50 percent in the House, 64 percent in the Senate — had at least one potential conflict.

The Tampa Tribune described a bill that would have forced hospitals to disclose patient injury rates and notify families of accidents that occurred in the hospital. The medical establishment was aghast at such enlightened consumerism. The Florida Senate Health Care Committee voted 5-2 to kill the bill. All five state senators who voted against the legislation had financial ties to the medical industry — as doctors, lawyers, employees of health care agencies.

That is exactly the kind of information people need to fully understand government decisions. Now, as power and money have shifted to the states and newspapers have achieved greater comfort and creativity with computer-assisted journalism, statehouse investigative reporting is more relevant, timely, and do-able than ever before. ◆

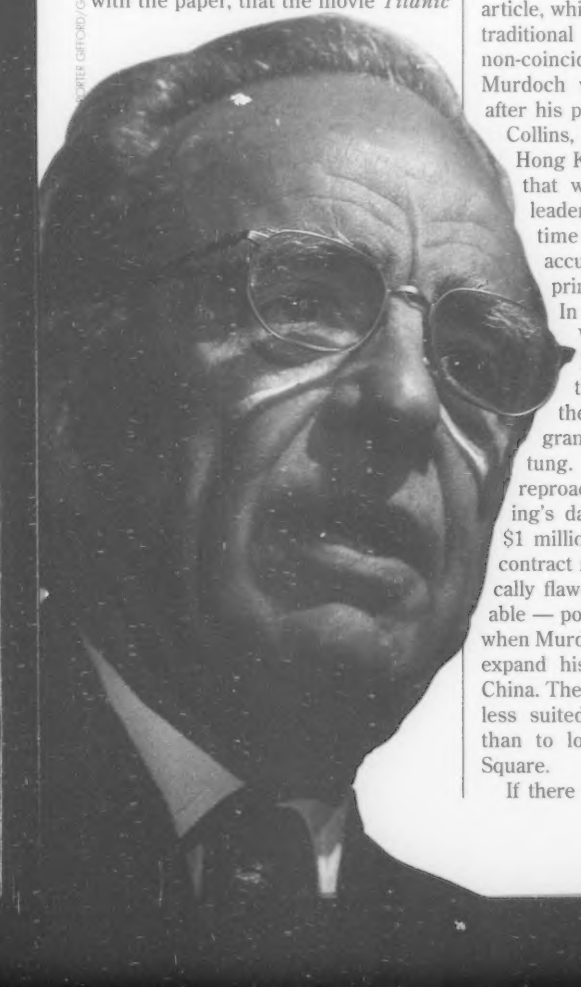
GO TO THE CJR WEB SITE (WWW.CJR.ORG) FOR LINKS TO THE ORGANIZATIONS AND STORIES IN THIS ARTICLE, AS WELL AS A ROUNDUP OF OTHER ELECTION-RELATED ONLINE DATABASES.

MURDOCH'S MEAN MACHINE

How Rupert uses his vast media power to help himself and hammer his foes

BY RUSS BAKER

Anyone but Rupert Murdoch might have been shamefaced over an article that appeared March 9 in his *New York Post*. It announced, in the tone of chest-thumping bravado identified with the paper, that the movie *Titanic* (which happens to be a co-production of Murdoch's Twentieth Century Fox) "is believed to be the first Hollywood film" to be endorsed by a Chinese leader. The writer characterized the Chinese masses as clamoring for the film — though it was not scheduled to open in Beijing for another month.



PORTER GIFFORD/GAMMA

To even a slightly trained eye, this article, which bore none of the signs of traditional reporting, was a disturbing non-coincidence. Contemporaneously, Murdoch was under heavy criticism after his publishing company, HarperCollins, cancelled a book by former Hong Kong governor Chris Patten, that was critical of the Chinese leadership. Nor was this the first time that Murdoch had been accused of placing profit before principle with regard to China. In 1994, he removed the BBC World Service from his satellite broadcasts into China at the request of the authorities there, who did not like a program BBC aired about Mao Tse-tung. Murdoch also had been reproached for giving Deng Xiaoping's daughter a huge (reportedly $1 million-plus) HarperCollins book contract for a fawning — and historically flawed and commercially nonviable — portrait of her father at a time when Murdoch was seeking approval to expand his broadcasting ventures in China. The book was pure propaganda, less suited to American nightstands than to loudspeakers in Tiananmen Square.

If there was ever an enterprise that needed a Chinese wall — in this case literally — it is Rupert Murdoch's News Corp. Yet the very concept of such a wall, meant to protect one part of a large conglomerate from the depredations of another, seems foreign to News Corp's chief. Rupert's Rule appears to be that all lines are permeable. And the notion of synergy, so logical and beneficial in many commercial enterprises, takes on a cynical and even malevolent cast when the corporation is a multimedia empire with Murdoch at the helm. This is particularly so in view of News Corp.'s recent boast that through its satellite, broadcast, and cable units, it will soon be able to reach more than three-quarters of the wired world.

Murdoch uses his diverse holdings, which include newspapers, magazines, sports teams, a movie studio, and a book publisher, to promote his own financial interests at the expense of real news-gathering, legal and regulatory rules, and journalistic ethics. He wields his media as instruments of influence with politicians who can aid him, and savages his competitors in his news columns. If ever someone demonstrated the dangers of mass power being concentrated in few hands, it would be Murdoch.

To understand the effects of Murdoch's special brand of synergy, one must begin where it all began for Keith Rupert Murdoch — in Australia. Down under, Murdoch owns half of a major airline group, co-owns one of the country's

Free-lance writer Russ Baker's last piece for CJR, *in the September/October issue, was about increasing pressure by advertisers on editors.*

pay TV operators and a Rugby league, and controls more than 60 percent of the country's metro, regional, and suburban newspapers, from an upscale national broadsheet, *The Australian*, to mass-market daily tabloids.

Murdoch's taste for corporate cross-pollination was never more apparent than on March 3, 1995, when readers of his hometown paper, the Adelaide *Advertiser*, might understandably have mistaken the front page for a paid ad. An article

IN THE U.S., MURDOCH IS THE TEFLON MAN

told them they could soon enjoy the most advanced pay television channel in the world, including sports and the latest releases from Twentieth Century Fox; it was a "gateway to a new era." The newspaper neglected to mention that many of the same movies had already been shown on free channels. Murdoch's other Australian papers ran similar, ad-style copy. *The Herald-Sun* of Melbourne headlined, FINALLY, A CLEAR VISION ON PAY TV. Then, the paper cheekily asked readers to call in on its "Vote Line," and answer the question, "Do you plan to subscribe to pay TV?" (The paper then actually charged for each incoming call). Even Murdoch's quality paper, *The Australian*, ran eleven full pages on the non-story.

A Murdoch financial columnist went as far as to advise readers to buy stock of News Corp., claiming both objectivity and insight. "I do have that insider's advantage of knowing what's it all about," wrote Terry McCrann in the *Daily Times-Mirror* of Sydney. Four days later, he popped up in Murdoch's Adelaide *Sunday Mail* interviewing the boss: "You've certainly led one of the most extraordinary lives in the twentieth century and it's been entirely of your own making. Can you accept the accolade that you are probably the most remarkable Australian in about 200 years?" "Oh, I don't believe that for a minute," a modest Murdoch demurred.

Over the years, a feisty dialogue over Murdoch's methods has grown, and not only in Australia. In England, the decision not to publish Chris Patten's book critical of the Chinese sparked an unexpected revolt. British papers jumped on the story with gusto. Their readers learned of a "smoking memo" in which HarperCollins UK chairman Eddie Bell revealed that "KRM [Keith Rupert Murdoch] has outlined to me the negative aspects of publication." *The Daily Telegraph*, *The Independent*, *The Guardian*, and many other papers also reported that the literary editor who handled the book had left the company and sued over it.

But Murdoch's British papers, including his flagship, *The Times* of London, ignored the story — until their ostrich act became the story. Then, they concentrated on putting out Murdoch's version of events, a rendition that lacked credibility. Meanwhile, it emerged that the recently retired East Asia editor of *The Times*, Jonathan Mirsky, had told a January Freedom Forum gathering that the paper "has simply decided, because of Murdoch's interests, not to cover China in a serious way." Mirsky also said that he has a transcript of a 1997 conversation between *The Times*'s editor, Peter Stothard, and the Chinese vice premier in which Stothard apologizes for having inquired about a Chinese dissident.

Murdoch's British tabloid, *The Sun*, recently reversed its opposition to the controversial Millennium Dome — an enormous exhibition hall ("the world's largest dome") to be built in London — after Murdoch's British Sky Broadcasting (BSkyB) satellite service became a key investor. The English reading public had seen this before. Murdoch's firing of editors Harold Evans of *The Times* (in 1982) and Andrew Neil of the *Sunday Times* (in 1994) were both widely felt to be over reporting by the papers that angered the Tory governments — during a period when government decisions were massively enriching the tycoon.

This press lord uses some of his media outlets for more than simple financial gain. HarperCollins has repeatedly paid stunning book advances to public figures who can be — or have been — enormously helpful on the political front. Since such books rarely earn back their advances, they appear to be outright gifts — or worse. HarperCollins, for instance, offered a $4.5 million book advance to U.S. House Speaker Newt Gingrich (who renounced part of it under withering criticism) while major telecommunications legislation was before Congress.

During the regimes of Prime Ministers Margaret Thatcher and John Major in Britain, Murdoch ventures — especially his purchase of newspapers and the launch of his BSkyB service — were repeatedly favored with easing of regulations and with government failure to invoke monopoly oversight. Murdoch's papers, in turn, played a central role in bolstering Thatcher's career and virulently attacked her opponents. Thatcher's memoirs, for which she is believed to have accepted at least $3 million, were published by HarperCollins. John Major, too, is believed to have accepted a seven-figure advance from Murdoch. Now there is talk that a coalition of other publishing companies should jointly outbid Murdoch for Prime Minister Tony Blair's future memoirs, in an effort to blunt News Corp.'s influence with the Laborite, which is already strong.

In the United States, Murdoch's percentage of media ownership is lower (except for television) than in England and Australia, but his influence and reach are growing quickly. His U.S. properties include Twentieth Century Fox, HarperCollins, *TV Guide*, the *New York Post*, Fox Broadcasting, Fox News Channel, Fox Sports Net, *The Weekly Standard*, and television stations in New York (WNYW), Washington (WTTG), Los Angeles (KTTV), Philadelphia (WTXF), Chicago (WFLD), Atlanta (WAGA), Boston (WFXT), Phoenix (KSAZ), and fourteen other cities.

"His company has grown so rapidly I'm not sure people have stopped to look at how he got where he is," says *Washington Post* staff writer Paul Farhi. Late last year, the *Washington Post* front-paged Farhi's examination of possible accounting sleight of hand by News Corp. The article explored ways the company, which is run chiefly from Los Angeles and New York but calls Australia its corporate headquarters, is able to use that country's arcane accounting methods to turn a potential net loss of $155 million (under tough U.S. standards) into a gain of $561 million — thereby enabling acquisition binges. Ironically, while putting the best face on its financial fortunes, News Corp. has been able to keep its worldwide corporate tax rates surprisingly low (roughly one-fifth those paid by Disney, Time Warner, and Viacom), largely by shifting income through an

almost unfathomable web to low-tax and no-tax havens in places as far-flung as the Cayman Islands, Fiji, and even Cuba. Virtually no other media organizations followed up on this story.

Farhi says that when he began his own reporting, he found that no one would talk to him — not even Murdoch's competitors. Similarly, CJR found competitors refusing to speak for the record. Some noted ruefully how the range of possible employers has narrowed with media consolidation.

Americans know little about Murdoch. And no wonder. In the U.S., he truly has been the Teflon man. When the $4.5 million advance to Gingrich became public, nearly all of the criticism was leveled at Gingrich, not the publishing company, which was willing to pay far more than seemed to make business sense. The story that News Corp. had hidden from the Federal Communications Commission the extent of its ownership of Fox in 1985, when that company began assembling a new television network, also got relatively little play.

Not much has been reported on the wide range of loopholes, operating waivers, and other gambits employed by News Corp. in its U.S. television expansion. One was getting around former FCC rules limiting the number of stations owned to twelve by investing in — and thus influencing — some twice that number. Staffers departed from Murdoch's employ, miraculously reappearing as managers at the stations he technically did not control. Another was receiving unusual permission to provide National Football League broadcasts to border-region Mexican television stations that beam those games back into the United States.

Murdoch employees seldom express the sort of skepticism of bosses common among journalists. That's a stark contrast, for example, to the atmosphere at the *New York Post*'s cross-town rival, the *Daily News*, where some employees openly exhibit disdain for owner Mortimer Zuckerman and his trademark fickleness and incessant meddling. Says *Post* reporter Gersh Kuntzman of Murdoch: "In the newsroom, everyone loves him. He's really charismatic, a very intelligent person. Not just a figurehead."

So dynamic and larger-than-life is Murdoch that even top people who are fired by him (almost always through intermediaries) continue to hymn his virtues. Says David Salter, longtime executive producer of the Australian Broadcasting Company's program, *Media Watch*: "His executives fall over each other trying to out-praise his business acumen and flair, conveniently forgetting that not so long ago the whole News Corporation empire was one tiny financial heartbeat away from total collapse. How that unique News Corp. culture has been developed and sustained is one of the enduring mysteries."

Another factor is that many employees enjoy working at Murdoch's free-wheeling tabloid properties, both for the sheer *Front Page* exuberance and for a general sense that the company takes care of its employees. Almost no one except the highest-ranking editors ever experiences direct interference from Murdoch. Harold Evans, forced out as editor of *The Times* of London, said in his memoirs that critics were wrong in suggesting that Murdoch was dictating language to his editors. "He is not a miniaturist," Evans wrote. "He creates an aura." Murdoch makes his wishes known, according to Evans, by constantly disparaging politicians or others he doesn't like, generally criticizing articles ("Now what do you want to do that for?"), and sending along screeds from other publications, often right-wing magazines, with notes like "Worth reading!" The message is unmistakable.

published stateside ("blowback" in espionage argot) about matters like Clinton's visit to Moscow during his college days. Since 1992, the *New York Post* has often taken the lead in initiating and running with leaks, tips, and speculation about Clinton, especially on the wild question of whether Vincent Foster was murdered, and examinations of Clinton's personal behavior. *Post* editors, employing a favorite Murdoch technique, use headlines to indict when the material in the article is itself inconclusive. (CAUGHT IN THE ACT was one early header in both the *Post* and the *Daily News* during the Monica Lewinsky saga.) *Post* reporters were so weary of their relentless coverage of Clinton scandals that when word came that a judge had thrown out the Paula Jones case, a cheer rose in the newsroom.

Clinton's FCC, unlike those of the Reagan and Bush eras, has at least made Murdoch sweat by reviewing the circumstances under which he was able to assemble the Fox network. "He can get more done with a Republican administration, whether it's FCC approvals, environmental concerns, or trade issues," says former *Post* editor Lou Colasuonno.

Here again, his years of courting Republicans has paid off. After ten years of indifference, the FCC looked at Fox Television in 1994 to see if it was foreign-owned (Murdoch became a U.S. citizen although his company is registered in Australia). Conservative Republicans, who might otherwise have opposed foreign ownership, instead attacked the FCC. "They lambasted me for the audacity of having looked into the question," recalls former FCC chair Reed Hundt. (Consistent with Murdoch's good fortune, the panel, led by the GOP appointees, ultimately voted with Murdoch.)

Another target of Murdoch, historically, has been the Kennedy family. A big factor in his disdain was Senator Ted Kennedy's sponsorship of legislation that forced him to sell his beloved *Post* in 1988 because of his cross-ownership of the local New York television station, WNYW. His bitterness toward Kennedy seemed to ease when Kennedy, of all people, backed

NEW YORK'S MAYOR BATTLED FOR NEWS CORP.

Jetting from one continent to another and working the phones incessantly, Murdoch does maintain a constant personal presence among his top editors and producers. Kuntzman, a popular *Post* reporter who says he loves his job and isn't pressured on what he writes, nevertheless points to page two, which is internally referred to as the "Pravda Page." Says he: "When there's a major [Murdoch] business deal going down, with no interest to readers, it's on page two. Or when [Senator Alfonse] D'Amato [a Murdoch favorite] makes a pronouncement of no particular interest to readers, it's on page two. Maybe our editor, Ken Chandler, is trying to catch Murdoch's eye."

Murdoch did what he could to prevent Bill Clinton's election in 1992, including running stories in his British papers, which were then picked up and

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his right to re-purchase the *Post* in 1993 on the basis that the *Post* might otherwise fold. Soon after he regained the *Post*, Murdoch bought back his Boston television station after selling his Kennedy-tormenting *Boston Herald*, raising questions in some minds about a quid pro quo.

In New York City politics, Murdoch's power is legendary. "Murdoch created Ed Koch as mayor, and they had a very good relationship," says Dick Belsky, city editor during Murdoch's first round of *Post* ownership. Murdoch's influence waned somewhat during the tenure of Mayor David Dinkins, whom the *Post* relentlessly attacked. His successor, Rudy Giuliani, has felt the full force of Murdoch's favor on both the editorial and news pages.

During Giuliani's first term, News Corp. received a $20.7 million tax break for the mid-Manhattan office building that houses the *Post*, Fox News Channel, *TV Guide*, and other operations. During Giuliani's 1997 reelection campaign, News Corp. was also angling for hefty city tax breaks and other incentives to set up a new printing plant in New York City rather than move to New Jersey. Most dramatically, Giuliani jumped in to aggressively champion News Corp. when it battled Time Warner over a slot for the Fox News Channel on Time Warner's local cable system. (Beyond the existing synergy, the mayor's wife, Donna Hanover, is a correspondent on the local Fox TV station, WNYW.)

Three years into Giuliani's first term, veteran *Village Voice* political reporter Wayne Barrett asked *Post* editorial page editor Eric Breindel if the paper had run a single editorial critical of the administration; Breindel, he says, admitted it had not. According to Barrett, the paper pulled off a perfect four-year streak before finding disagreement with the mayor late last year — over his harsh treatment of a fiscally conservative business-funded "watchdog" organization that investigates waste in government.

"It's not only what they write, it's what they won't write, what they won't say," argues Barrett. The *Post*, for example, has not run any major stories about a serious conflict involving top Giuliani political advisers Raymond Harding and Herman Badillo lobbying city agencies for private clients of their law firm. By comparison, the *Daily News* — whose owner Zuckerman is a Giuliani loyalist with real estate projects before the city and who has saved millions based on Giuliani administration decisions — has run more than a dozen stories on the Harding-Badillo situation. And when *Vanity Fair* published a story about the mayor's seemingly rocky marriage and closeness to his female communications director — a scandal of the sort the *Post* typically loves — the paper took off after *Vanity Fair* with the energy and enthusiasm of a converted sinner.

Almost completely absent are stories highlighting problems in the police department, in the mayor's workfare program, in social services. "Nobody is doing enterprise stories in those areas," says a former reporter. "They don't want it." Any negative stories about the administration tend to be about bureaucracy stepping on the little guy. The mayor is usually a bystander, as outraged as anyone.

In playing political hardball with his news columns, Murdoch is guilty of degree rather than kind. Many media barons do it, but with more decorum and finesse. In other areas, however, Murdoch seems to stand almost alone, and very exposed. One obvious Murdoch trademark is his use of bathing beauties and sex to sell copies, a tendency that has even afflicted the once-staid *TV Guide*. Another is race-baiting. During the interregnum, when Murdoch did not own the *Post*, that paper's tendency to inflame racial passions in New York diminished remarkably. But Murdoch is back in force. "The one enduring theme at the *Post* is exposing the bad Negro wherever he or she may be," says Jim Dwyer, a Pulitzer Prize-winning columnist at the arch-rival *Daily News*.

One variation appeared in a *Post* editorial last December 3. Titled JOHN HOPELESS FRANKLIN, it was a vicious attack on eighty-three-year-old John Hope Franklin, the eminent black historian whom President Clinton named to head his advisory commission on race. Franklin had had the effrontery to speak about the notion of white superiority following the Civil War and the country's failure to confront "its own Holocaust, its own violence." The *Post* labeled this "a slander against the United States and its white citizens," and ended with the words: "Now it's long past time for him to shut the hell up."

Murdoch's personal conservatism does not necessarily make him an exemplar of political principle. He is at heart a man who knows which way the winds blow. For a staunch anti-communist, Murdoch's China policy represents a stunning display of pragmatism in service of the bottom line. He moves effortlessly

between Republicans and Democrats, Tories and Laborites, capitalists and communists, depending on what deals are cooking. For a time in the 1980s, Murdoch owned the left-leaning *Village Voice* and had the good sense not to trifle with the profitable weekly. Like Richard Nixon, whom he greatly admired, Murdoch talks an anti-establishment line that belies his real interests. (He also fosters an up-by-the-bootstraps image that hardly squares with a childhood of privilege as son of a wealthy, titled Australian newspaper owner.)

His protean tactics make competing with Murdoch a bewildering and frustrating experience. Only one thing is certain: marshaling all the means at his disposal, he plays to win. Of course, plenty of News Corp. staffers strive to produce quality journalism. Yet those who so aspire face a tough challenge when opportunities for intra-corporation backscratching present themselves. When the Chris Patten book flap erupted, *The New York Times* and the *Daily News* reported the uproar and ensuing revolt by some of HarperCollins's other authors. But the *Post*, known for intensively covering publishing, ran nothing.

At the same time, the launch of Murdoch's Fox News Channel (FNC) was treated in the *Post* with the same sort of urgency as his Australian Pay TV launch in his Australian papers. When FNC was told by Time Warner that the New York City cable position it expected would go instead to MSNBC, Murdoch filed suit. Giuliani intervened on his behalf, on the ground that FNC meant jobs for New York. The *Post*, too, swung into action. Day after day, it ran headlines, gossip items, and cartoons that alternately tweaked and slammed Time Warner vice chairman Ted Turner (who once intemperately compared Murdoch to Hitler).

"The paper was going beyond 'news you can use' or even care about, and settling a personal score," says a former reporter. Ex-*Post* editor Lou Colasuonno agrees. "Time Warner employs about 12,000 people in New York, far more than Fox will ever employ. It was complete nonsense, the way he used the *Post* as a club to the beat the issue to death, for his own monetary gain. He needed that market."

Some staffers were embarrassed (but not really surprised) when the *Post* played the FNC's New York City launch party as big news, even though its own readers couldn't see the station on their cable systems. "A lot of it was just understood, if there's something big involving Murdoch, somebody's going," says a former reporter. "Any event concerning Murdoch was covered disproportionately with its newsworthiness. We'd run, for example, fluff items any time Murdoch got an award." By contrast, a regular column devoted to skewering *The New York Times* — secretly enjoyed by many a journalist elsewhere — is not only self-serving but also a classic pot-calling-the-kettle situation.

And it is easy to see how the *Post* positions the financial fortunes of News Corp. and its competitors for the consumption of its heavy Wall Street readership. In its February 5 media business section, one headline reads NEWS CORP. POSTS 23 PERCENT EARNINGS RISE and is accompanied by a box putting News Corp. alongside competitors that are faring poorly, rather than those that are doing well. Next to this is an article about *The New York Times* cutting its suburban price, in a move termed "ganging up on small suburban papers," although the *Post*'s aggressive price-cutting is never couched in such terms. The

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The quality of an applicant's professional work will be given more weight than advanced degrees, although familiarity with the academic world would be helpful. Previous teaching experience, particularly a record as an instructor at a graduate level, will be considered an asset.

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article, headlined PRODIGAL *TIMES* PARES STAND PRICE IN 'BURBS, waits eleven paragraphs before noting that the New York Times Company's just-released earnings report showed profits more than tripled during 1997.

That same issue of the *Post* was chock full with self-promotional material, including an article on a billboard that has gone up in Times Square promoting Fox's show, *King of the Hill*, and plugs for Fox TV specials, which are variously described as "jaw-dropping," "megasuccessful," and "highly anticipated," while shows from other networks earn less-effusive wordplay.

Titanic had unsurpassed popularity and revenues, yet the coverage in the *Post* still managed to seem excessive. The paper invented endless ways to run articles about the movie (often more than one) almost every day in the period preceding the Academy Awards. This saturation presumably also had a salutary affect on the legions of Wall Streeters who read the *Post* and judge News Corp. stock's worthiness.

Covering Advance Publications's sale of its Random House unit to Bertelsmann, the *Post* took an opportunity to slam Harold Evans, former president and publisher of Random House and Murdoch ex-employee, who is now editorial director overseeing the *Post*'s competitor, the *Daily News*. The story called him "poster boy for high-spending perks and excessive book deals that flopped." It used words like "blew," "failed," "squandered" while presenting in neutral terms HarperCollins's $270 million writeoff and drastic publishing schedule cuts and staff firings.

The paper does sometimes report negative news about Murdoch that appears in competing publications. Says a former editor about a reported 1996 raid of News Corp. offices by Israeli authorities looking into whether a Murdoch-controlled company had tried to evade taxes on $150 million in income: "When Rupert was in trouble in Israel with that tax stuff, we'd pick up the wires and not spin it."

On February 26, the *Post*'s TVPlus section ran four short news items — one noting problems at competing cable outlets (Time Warner's Court TV and NBC's CNBC), and the other three putting a positive spin on Fox. One item mentioned that several players on Fox's *Melrose Place* would be leaving, "part of an attempt by producers to focus on the show's core cast," ignoring that the program's popularity has plummeted and that several of those leaving were core cast. Another item reported that FX (a network that is 50 percent owned by Murdoch) "has snagged the syndicated repeat rights to WB's hit drama, *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*." It went on to point out — or perhaps prod viewers — that FX "is still not available to Time Warner subscribers in New York" and that they are also missing out on reruns of *The X-Files* and *NYPD Blue*.

Fox products are peppered throughout the paper. Gossip columnist Liz Smith, for example, often incorporates News Corp. in seemingly tortured ways, such as this mention of two different News Corp. entities in one gratuitous sentence: "I was reading the morning papers in the Fox-TV/Channel 5 green room when in trooped Alex Linz, Fox [Network]'s replacement for Macaulay Culkin in the studio's new *Home Alone 3*."

Murdoch has opened a new front of corporate synergy with his purchase of the Los Angeles Dodgers. Before agreeing to it, owners of other teams expressed worries that, with his deep pockets, he can afford to woo top players with salaries that will contribute to the spiraling costs that have endangered bottom lines and antagonized fans. Rumors that Murdoch will pick up a stake in the Los Angeles Lakers and a new hockey stadium can only provoke additional concern.

TV Guide, which Murdoch bought in 1988 (along with *Seventeen* and *The Racing Form*) for a mind-boggling $3 billion, has 9.8 million subscribers, way down from a peak of 20 million in 1977. But it remains a strong influence on viewers. Last year *TV Guide* named Fox's *King of the Hill* the best show on television. Few critics would agree. Within several months last year *TV Guide* ran three covers on Fox's *Mighty Morphin Power Rangers*, three on *The X-Files*, and a *Simpsons* Collector's Edition. In the *Simpsons* issue, the Cheers & Jeers feature offered one cheer and three jeers. The cheer? A Fox show. In its designation over the last three years of "The Best Show You're Not Watching" two of the three were either Fox Network (*Party of Five*) or 20th Century Fox Television (ABC's *The Practice*). *TV Guide* has editorialized in favor of age-based instead of content-based ratings, which would benefit Fox because of the amount of violence in its programming.

TV Guide editors did not return CJR's phone calls, but Ari Karpel, editorial publicity director for the magazine, says that "isolated examples can 'prove' our slanted support for any network, but a careful reading of the past few years of *TV Guide* would reveal that we praise and criticize Fox shows with the same frequency with which we praise and criticize shows on every network." Brian Lowry, who covers television business for the *Los Angeles Times*, says that "periodically, there is some handwringing [by Fox competitors] over *TV Guide* playing favorites at Fox, followed by loud protestations and a cover on whatever network complained. Some network execs say they complain about *TV Guide* just to keep them in line."

Murdoch's behavior has some competitors up in arms. Says NBC's colorful West Coast president Don Ohlmeyer, who is regularly held up to ridicule in the *New York Post*: "Until the rest of the media decide to take a hard look at Rupert's empire the way his media look at other people's empires, he's won. People genuinely fear him, and that's a good position to be in in this business."

WILL MURDOCH'S HEIRS HAVE HIS HEART?

Murdoch's Citizen Kane model isn't going away. At sixty-seven, he's preparing a new generation to take over his domain. Will his heirs prove to have the man's heart? Or will they miraculously take heed of the words of the late Roy Thomson, Murdoch's predecessor as owner of *The Times* and *Sunday Times*. Thomson, whose son sold the money-losing *Times* to Murdoch, was so regularly beset by angry politicians over his papers' independent spirit that he had his credo set down on cards he would hand out, explaining that he just wasn't involved with what his employees wrote: "[N]o person or group can buy or influence editorial support . . . I do not believe that a newspaper can be run properly unless its editorial columns are run freely and independently by a highly skilled and educated professional journalist." ◆

The Law and The Internet BEWARE



BY DENISE CARUSO

The Internet has redefined the practice of journalism in the '90s. After an initial knee-jerk of technophobia, reporters and editors everywhere have assimilated e-mail messaging and scouring the World Wide Web into their daily routines. As a result, not only have they radically changed how they communicate with each other and with their sources, but they have also increased the amount and breadth of research they do for their stories, and vastly expanded the reach of their work as it is instantly distributed around the globe.

But despite these advances — and sometimes because of them — critical legal issues are being raised that profoundly challenge the foundations of journalism, as both news reporters and the news itself continue their inexorable march into cyberspace. Those issues include:

WHO'S A JOURNALIST?

The First Amendment includes neither a definition of journalism nor guidelines about who may be considered a practitioner. In cyberspace anyone can claim to be a journalist, or at least a publisher, creating his or her own publication and distributing it around the world with a single keystroke. And like it or not, the operators of thousands of one-man or garage-band news sites on the Web are, by federal law at least, considered "real" journalists just as much as staffers for mainstream news organizations.

Says Roberta Brackman, vice president of program content and intellectual property for NBC in New York: "There are not going to be new definitions of journalists. Journalists who research and write, whether for online, print, or broadcast, should be entitled to all the same protections and potential liabilities. The First Amendment has been, and will be, applied equally."

Thus Matt Drudge, proprietor of the notorious Internet gossip column The Drudge Report, is as legally accountable as News Corp. or Time Inc. for what he writes and distributes. Lately, for example, he has been sued by Clinton aide Sidney Blumenthal for publishing allegations from anonymous sources that Blumenthal was a wife beater. He retracted the story immediately, but Blumenthal proceeded with the suit. (See "Is AOL Responsible for Its Hip Shooter's Bullets?" CJR, November/December.)

SWIFT RETRACTIONS MAY REDEFINE LIBEL

The willingness to publish a retraction is often a key element in whether a publisher can be sued for libel, but retraction statutes that protect journalists vary widely from state to state — and "state" is a geographic distinction that does not exist in cyberspace. One problem is that some states may interpret the word "retraction" too narrowly to include online reporting and publishing. For example, an appellate court in Wisconsin found that its retraction statutes do not apply to messages posted on electronic bulletin-boards or forums — such as America Online — where individuals can "publish" messages at any time of the day or night.

Says Brackman: "The language in the Wisconsin statutes talks specifically about periodicals or magazines, and about being published in something that appears 'at regular intervals.'" The finding meant that in Wisconsin, at least, someone offended by a story or message published online could file suit without first asking for a retraction. Thus many legal experts expect the *Blumenthal* v. *Drudge* case to set a precedent for American libel law and publishing rights online.

According to Mike Godwin, staff counsel for the Electronic Frontier Foundation, a civil liberties organization in San Francisco, the negative effect of Drudge's online story "was almost certainly erased by subsequent online and traditional press coverage of the retraction." Brackman agrees. "The fact that Drudge went back the next day and [retracted] ought to have an impact on Blumenthal's ability to succeed. That's where online provides an unparalleled opportunity. You can make corrections on a moment's notice. If we correct our mistakes in a reasonable and timely matter, the law will have to find a way to accommodate that."

RESTRICTING ACCESS TO INFORMATION

As this story goes to press, the Clinton administration is pressing hard on Congress to pass an updated and profoundly restrictive copyright law for the age of the Internet. Called the "World Intellectual Property Organization Copyright Treaties Implementation Act," the WIPO bill would give big media and software companies — represented by the U.S. Patent & Trademark Office, which wrote the proposed law — the legal muscle to protect their property from unpaid electronic distribution, ostensibly by pirates who want to resell it. But the WIPO bill goes much further than that. It also has the potential to bar access to all kinds of information now

Denise Caruso is the Digital Commerce columnist for The New York Times.

available — for free — to journalists, scientists, researchers, librarians, and ordinary citizens under "fair use" provisions of the existing Copyright Act.

Fair use describes the circumstances under which someone can excerpt others' copyrighted work without having to pay them. It is by far the most critical component of copyright law for journalists, allowing them to cite information from books, magazines, movies, and virtually any other form of copyrighted information.

"That's the ultimate purpose of copyright — to promote knowledge and discussion," says Pamela Samuelson, an intellectual property law specialist at the University of California, Berkeley. But this concept often runs counter to the goals of large copyright holders.

The most profound implications of the administration's current proposal are likely to come from its provision for what is called "anti-circumvention." Let's say, for example, that a drug company has decided it will distribute information about its controversial AIDS drug only online — and then only for a price. It uses a technology called "copy-protection" to ensure that only people who pay a fee can unscramble and read it. If the Clinton administration's proposal becomes law, anyone who tries to crack that barrier — journalist or ordinary citizen — is breaking the law, even when the information itself, by law, should be made available for fair use.

Such a law has the potential to stop the flow of information dead in its tracks. Says Julie Fenster, vice president for law and business affairs of Time Inc. New Media: "Obviously we are creating enormous amounts of copyrighted materials every day, and of course I want to protect it. If someone is misusing or making money off what we create, then we try to stop it. But I'm scared that eventually there may be no fair use. Journalists may not be able to get at information without paying someone."

PROVING IDENTITY AND AUTHENTICITY ONLINE

Journalists are accustomed to trusting that the people they interview by telephone are who they say they are, but online communication presents much more serious challenges to identity. E-mail is unique as a medium because it is faceless and voiceless but seems very personal, sometimes more personal than a phone conversation. At the same time, it is easy to forge and alter. All the textual artifacts that give e-mail its distinctive look — its "to" and "from" memo format, its time and date stamp — can be falsified from any computer keyboard with a simple text editor, and transmitted with little effort or skill on the part of the sender. And desktop publishing has reached an astonishing level of sophistication: anyone with access to a computer, a scanner, and a color laser printer can create perfect copies of security badges, company logos, and official documents that can be presented in person, mailed or posted on the Web.

Existing fraud laws can usually handle identity scams and the falsifying of documents online. But at some point, news organizations might actually be held accountable, by misrepresented story subjects or sources, for not sufficiently protecting themselves against e-mail or document fraud. A possible solution would require reporters and their sources to use "digital signature" security software on their computers. With a technique called "public key encryption," digital signatures are able to confirm both the identity of message senders and the authenticity of the documents they transmit. If the use of digital signatures were sufficiently widespread, it would not have been possible, for example, for Mary Schmich's *Chicago Tribune* column to be distributed around the world, disguised as a commencement address by novelist Kurt Vonnegut — as happened last summer via the Internet.

Important stories belong online, and let the chips fall where they may

Public key encryption programs for e-mail — called PGP, for "Pretty Good Privacy" — are available free, for non-commercial use, on the Web. (One place to find them is at http://www.pgp.com.) The software is still too complicated for neophytes to use, but it may become a de facto requirement for journalists and activists eager to protect their information and messages from spoofers, as well as from the prying eyes of government.

PRIVACY AND "PROPERTIZING" OF PERSONAL INFORMATION

Privacy issues are becoming increasingly important in a networked world. What is unclear is whether citizens will have greater legal redress against violators of their privacy — including journalists and paparazzi — or whether we simply will become resigned to lives whose intimate details are utterly exposed to public view.

Technology has made these issues more complex and critical. Before the advent of sophisticated computer networks and databases, it would have been unthinkable to store a person's criminal records in the same file cabinet with his Medicare or Internal Revenue Service records. A reporter would have to request information from each of the agencies individually.

But digital networks now make it possible to "link" all these private records, for example, so they can be viewed together on the same computer screen, simply by connecting the computers in which these data are collected.

Other online databases, compiled from public information sources, also make it much easier for ordinary citizens to gather sensitive data about their neighbors: property tax assessments, bankruptcy filings, police blotter data.

But that's just a tiny fraction of the personal information that's compiled about individuals every day. Your local video store has records of all the movies you rent. The phone company knows every phone number you call, including 900 numbers. Supermarket scanners record your alcohol, tobacco, and cholesterol consumption. Your credit card company knows your income range, the size and composition of your family, the stores you frequent, your travel habits. Your doctor, your psychiatrist, your hospital, your pharmacist, and your medical insurance company store the minutiae of your physical and emotional health on networked computers.

The ability to compile all this information into extensive "database dossiers" is much desired by some government agencies, which so far have not been allowed to do so, and especially by marketeers who traffic in personal data. In a consumer culture, information about consumers' private habits is a valuable commodity. And except for constraints placed upon some agencies, financial institutions, and companies that control medical records, there are almost no restrictions in the U.S. on who can collect personal information and what they can do with it.

Today, in fact, whole books have been written about how ordinary citizens can snoop out personal information from online databases, and some professional snoops — scrupulous and otherwise — brag online that they can find out anything about any individual within twenty-four hours.

"What we're talking about here is information that's traditionally been public if the journalist has the patience and fortitude to find it," says NBC's Brackman. From the civil liberties perspective, she says, the ease with which database dossiers can be assembled from online sources is certainly frightening. "But if you put your journalist hat on, isn't it manna?"

Unlike the United States, the European Union has strict privacy controls on the gathering and dissemination of such information. It's illegal, for example, for a vendor to sell the name of a customer for any reason without that person's permission. This effectively gives EU citizens control over the distribution and sale of virtually all of their personal information — and a way to track culprits who break the rules.

RATING CONTENT: WHEN DOES A FILTER BECOME A CENSOR?

When almost anyone can be a publisher, the result is a tidal wave of "news" from sources far beyond the trusted, familiar shores of the mainstream press. This influx of fresh voices is a wondrous effect of technology, but no one can know whether such "news" is propaganda, a spoof, or real reportage.

The way we judge accuracy and credibility has become an issue in journalism on the most basic level, since any system that rates or ranks or filters information can accurately be called "censorship." One group, the Internet Content Coalition, which was formed to protect the online interests of professional journalists and media makers, hit the wall last year when it tried to forge a ratings system that would rank the quality of news sites on the Web. Quickly slammed as both self-serving and a possible violation of the First Amendment for limiting access to other people's speech, the group abandoned the idea. Says Julie Fenster, whose company was a founder of the ICC: "Time Inc. has taken the position that we'll never rate our own content, and we aren't talking about rating other people's content, either."

The ICC was also motivated by worries about another, more subtle form of censorship — software filters such as NetNanny, which block access to Web sites containing objectionable material. The ICC felt that such devices, in their haste to censor sex and violence, would also block out news sites with stories that mentioned those subjects.

Filters pose another problem for journalists as well. At first, they were embraced as a neutral alternative to government censorship — any special-interest group could devise its own set of filters according to its tastes and preferences. But because software filters are programmed not to allow access to any site that does not meet their individual criteria — even if a computer user specifically types in the web address — legal scholars now fear that filtering systems have created a private means of global censorship untouchable in a court of law.

With software filters, any private group — from the Christian Coalition to Disney to Microsoft — can render invisible to their members or customers huge chunks of the Internet for any reason they choose, including blocking access to unpopular viewpoints or to the Web sites of competitors. Lawrence Lessig, the Harvard Law School professor who briefly served as special master in the Justice Department's antitrust case against Microsoft, says this type of private regulation of the Internet "is a greater danger to free speech than public regulation." If Microsoft employs filters — for example, to block access to its competitors' Web sites, such as Netscape, or even Disney — it's a "private action," Lesser says, and can't be tested in court.

THE LAW OF THE LAND, WHERE THERE IS NO LAND

The global nature of the Internet creates potentially knotty questions about accountability and liability. Libel and free-speech laws, in particular, vary widely from country to country; Kitty Kelley's book on Princess Diana, for example, could not be published in the United Kingdom because libel laws are more restrictive there than in the U.S.

So what happens if *The New York Times on the Web* — which is accessible from anywhere in the world — is sued for libel by someone in, say, Botswana? If *The New York Times* has no assets in Botswana, "a libel judgment about the Internet could be worthless because U.S. courts won't enforce it," says Guylyn Cummins, a First Amendment specialist and partner of Gray Cary Ware & Friedenrich in San Diego. Of more concern is Mexico, where U.S. firms have substantial interests, Cummins points out. "If you say something bad about someone in Mexico, they can attach your assets," she says. "The First Amendment means nothing in that circumstance."

But in the final analysis, the global reach of the Internet — no matter how the legal issues are resolved — will remain one of its most enticing features for American journalists. If a story is significant, it needs to be on the Web, and let the legal chips fall where they may.

"Journalists have an important opportunity to have their material read, seen, and heard in places which, up to this point, had no access to it," says NBC's Brackman. "But that opportunity carries responsibility as well. Journalists have to continue to practice as we have before, and not write to the lowest legal common denominator of the places where our reporting may end up." ◆

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BOYS WILL BE GIRLS

Men's magazines have a new reader: meet Cosmo Guy

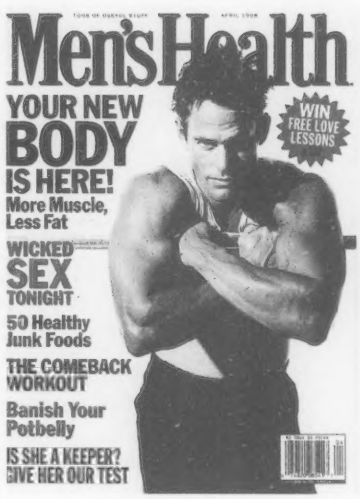
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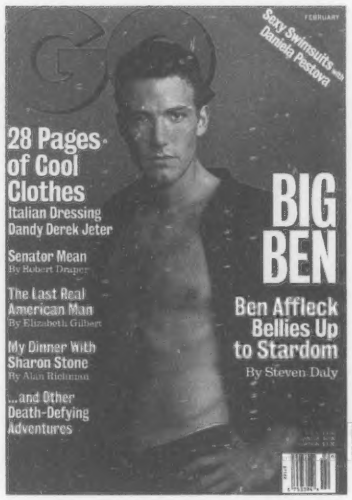
YOUR CLOCK IS TICKING
Q: HOW DO I KNOW IF I'M A GOOD KISSER?
FOODS THAT FIGHT FAT!

Sound like the parade of neurotic women's magazines at your supermarket counter? Close. All three headlines appeared recently in top-selling men's magazines, which are increasingly indistinguishable from their female counterparts. A new male reader has emerged, one whom people in the magazine business sardonically — and accurately — have dubbed the "Cosmo Guy."

Cosmo Guy is consumed with insecurity about his appearance, and *Men's Health* is his bible. The cover of *Men's Health* — a nearly full-body shot of a model — looks just like *Cosmo*'s. Cover lines that exhort physical self-improvement seem to emanate from his body. *Cosmo* has long rallied its readers with battle cries like "Big Butt Be Gone!"; this April *Men's Health* prods similar soft spots: "Banish Your Potbelly."

Launched ten years ago, *Men's Health* only recently became the business success that it is today. "No one took us too seriously for the first six or seven years," says founding and current editor Michael Lafavore, 45. "It's a boring name." Now *Men's Health* boasts a monthly circulation of 1.5 million and climbing — more than its two closest competitors, *GQ* (688,000) and *Esquire* (658,000) combined — and in the past five years its ad revenues have increased by 150 percent, to $52.9 million in 1997.





Cosmo Guy has other suitors, too. *Esquire*, *GQ*, and *Details* have always had fashion pages, but now they're all attending to the man under the clothes. *GQ*, which takes in more money in ad sales — $75.7 million in 1997 — than any other men's magazine, recently posed, to a handful of guys, this burning question: If you were stuck on a desert island, what would be the one grooming product you couldn't live without? Passionate testimonials ensued, about Tweezerman tweezers — to combat that "unibrow . . . Movie Stars, they all pluck" — and Christian Dior's firming night treatment: "Who cares if it's made for sixty-year-old ladies?" *Esquire* recently featured a first-person essay by a guy who, hair waning, decided to shave it all off, accompanied by before/after pics and instructions about how to follow suit.

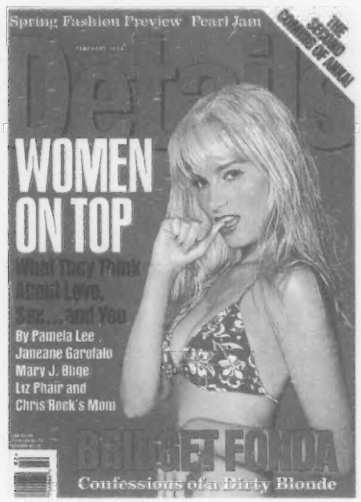
All the men's magazines cajole the reader to attend to his abs, however reluctant he might be (fast-growing downmarket newcomer *Maxim* offers workout tips "For Guys Who Hate Gyms"). Last June, when Michael Caru-

Liza Featherstone is a free-lance writer who lives and reads in Brooklyn.

so, 36, became editor-in-chief of *Details* (which, with a half-million buyers, lags just behind *Esquire*), he announced his intention to devote more pages to health, fitness, and grooming.

Men's Health editor Lafavore says the new preoccupation with men's appearance is due largely to the aging of the baby boomers: "We're getting old. As a generation we kind of decided we weren't going to grow up, so now we're completely shocked." Then there's the American health and fitness mania, which *Self* editor-in-chief Judith Daniels calls "the great equalizer" because it has seized women and men alike.

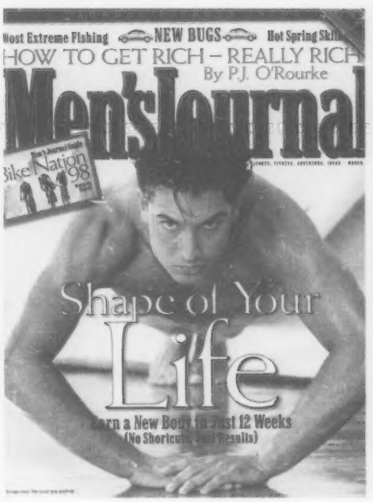
Men's magazines used to present the reader with a world away from women. Life-style magazines all sell fantasies, and theirs was generally a fishing trip with the buddies, away from the wife — or in *GQ*'s case, with the Log Cabin boys. *GQ* used to mention women so infrequently that it was regarded as a (discreetly) gay maga-



zine. Now sex and relationships — always the straight kind — have a regular presence in its pages (albeit a tormented one. Typical passage: "She's naked and sprawled across his bed — but is this necessarily a good thing?" In a recent personal essay, a married writer wondered if he should go to an amusement park with the cute chick from his office).

Increasingly, men's magazines, like women's, serve as field guides to the rocky terrain of heterosexual mating and relating. "Ask Jimmy the Bartender," *Men's Health*'s new feature, is an advice column on "women, sex, and other stuff that screws up men's lives." *Details* instructs men on how to write a winning love letter (concluding with a reminder to make sure it's welcome — John Hinckley to Jodie Foster being the classic Don't). The magazine also mercilessly ribs men for their self-defeating behavior ("Five Reasons Why You're Not Going to Get Lucky Tonight" — written, like many of *Details*'s sex pieces, by a woman).

Indeed, like some women's magazines — *Cosmo* often reads like a scary focus-group session in which men hold forth on women — men's magazines now often present interviews with members of the opposite sex as a blueprint for self-improvement. Women (some 5,000 of them, we're to understand) told *Men's Health* what they want in the sack (forty-something guys, preliminary massages, flattery) and what they don't want (too much back hair, dumb questions like "Was it good for you?"). For a recent *GQ* piece redefining "The New Gentleman," the author "went straight to the experts . . . Ladies?"



Steven Cohn, editor of *Media Industry Newsletter*, thinks this new concern with sex and relationships has much to do with the mainstreaming of the women's movement and men's consequent confusion. "In the old days, the caveman days before *Ms.*, men just grabbed women by the hair. This has changed, so men need help."

Our New Man is also a shopaholic; men's magazines are awash in products. *Men's Health* recently featured — this is editorial content, not advertising — six different shampoos to pouf up thinning hair, and tells where to buy them. *Self*'s Judith Daniels points out that evaluating products, "sorting out the hooey from the good stuff — that's what women's magazines have always done." Of course, the rise of service journalism in men's magazines is part of a larger genderless trend too. As Daniels observes: "Service is creeping into the mainstream. Even daily newspapers have finally caught on to the fact that people want to know how to do something better, cheaper, faster."

Zealous coverage of celebrities is nothing new for men's magazines; in its heyday, *Esquire* sent an editor to India for a week to hang out with Allen Ginsberg. But then the articles tended to focus on the famous person's work or character. Now, like women's magazines, men's magazines are hen houses of celebrity gossip, obsessed with the personal lives of the rich and famous. *GQ*'s food critic Alan Richman, in February's "My Dinner with Sharon Stone," irks the star by criticizing her taste in men. Other examples include *Details*'s "Matt Dillon: The Original Wild Thing," a profile that highlights Dillon's relationship with the



actress Cameron Diaz, and *Esquire*'s infamous "'Kevin Spacey Has a Secret," a murkily allegoric profile ("My mom said: 'I hear he's gay.'") by Tom Junod, packaged as a celebrity outing. *Esquire* dispatched reporter Celia Farber to slink around O.J.'s house.

While Cosmo Guy reflects a welcome cultural shift toward greater sexual equality, one wonders how much more appearance-consciousness society needs. For that matter, both women's and men's magazines would probably be better if they devoted more space to ideas and stories and less to shameless panting

after products. *Esquire*'s Dubious Achievement issue was pretty dismal this year: "I, Stalkerazzi," an odd and rambling first-person account of John Richardson's stint as a paparazzo, the thrills and the moral dilemmas, was the only piece that could accurately be called journalism. *GQ* averages about two strong pieces a month. Senior writer Mary A. Fischer, for instance, regularly investigates real outrages, like the U.S. government's School of the Americas, which, she reports, has trained some of Latin America's worst human-rights abusers. But with all the fussing about readers' butts, there seems to be increasingly less room for such writing in men's magazines. And their coverage of sex and women — though abundant — generally fails to offer much real insight. It tends to be whiney, in fact, as well as defensive and conventional. References to homosexuality are nervous, and women are consistently typed as possessive, frigid, and mysteriously cranky — or worse. In the April issue, Greg Donaldson describes a four-year marriage to a six-foot-two Amazon who physically assaulted him on a regular basis.

But it's still possible that, in the long run, broadly re-defining men's interests could make men's magazines more layered and diverse. Thus, the next logical question — with all the top-selling men's magazines cross-dressing, can women's magazines be far behind? Will women's magazines become more like men's magazines?

There's no stampede just yet. The long-established, high-grossing women's magazines — from *Good Housekeeping* to *Mademoiselle* — aren't about to overhaul their profitable formulas. In 1996, women's magazines pulled in $2,884,328,000 in ad revenues, four times as much as men's magazines. It's no wonder men's magazines are imitating them so studiously. Nearly all women's magazines acknowledge a more intelligent, feminist, career-oriented reader than they did twenty years ago. Yet this imagined reader's interests — looks, shopping, sex, men — remain recognizably feminine in the most old-fashioned sense of the word.

WITH TOP-SELLING MEN'S MAGAZINES CROSS-DRESSING, CAN WOMEN'S MAGAZINES BE FAR BEHIND?

Still, several mavericks recently have been offering a different vision of the future. Though it is less deserved recently, men's magazines have always had a more literary reputation than women's magazines. But *Mirabella* now might appeal to the old *Esquire* reader reincarnated as a woman, publishing hot novelist A.M. Homes on artist Cindy Sherman, and Alain de Boton and David Mamet on "men without women." Not only is the books section long and relatively highbrow, the whole magazine reflects a bookish sensibility: a film piece muses at length on the novels of Henry James, and words like "eponymous" pop up in discussions of how to style your frizzy hair.

Recent start-ups are even bolder. Fairchild's *Jane*, launched last year by former *Sassy* editor Jane Pratt, storms the tree fort on a number of fronts, with coverage of cars and rock 'n' roll. (Music

The Society of Professional Journalists announces the $30,000

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The history

The Society of Professional Journalists began the Pulliam Fellowship in 1977 through a grant from Mrs. Eugene C. Pulliam. The fellowship honors the memory of Eugene C. Pulliam, one of the original members of the Society, founded in 1909 as Sigma Delta Chi. Pulliam was also the publisher of The Indianapolis Star, The Indianapolis News, The Arizona Republic and The Phoenix Gazette.

The fellowship today

The fellowship, a grant of $30,000, is awarded annually to an outstanding editorial writer to help broaden his or her journalistic horizons and knowledge of the world through travel or study. The award can be used to cover the costs of study in any field and/or the costs of travel in the United States or abroad.

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Qualified applicants will have at least three years full-time editorial writing experience, outstanding writing and analytical abilities and a specific plan for study and/or travel. Applicants must send a one page personal biography, a summary of professional experience, five samples of your editorials, your plan for study and/or travel with a discussion of how this award will enhance your professional development and a letter of endorsement from your employer. All entries must be in English.

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has traditionally been left to young men's magazines like *Details*, as well as historically male-targeted magazines like *Rolling Stone* and *Spin*.) *Jane* is also funny. While men's magazines, even when obnoxious, have usually been good for a laugh, women's magazines tend to be deadly earnest about everything from seducing men to the merits of liquid eyeliner. But irony — even self-mockery — pervades *Jane*.

Then there's sports. The female sports fan, for a few months last year, had plenty to read; new women's magazines that tackled classic men's magazine material — bonefishing, boxing, people who die trying to take photos while heli-skiing.

Jump, a new magazine for teenage girls, despite tips on quick-dry nail polishes and tinted hair mousses, is more *Men's Journal* than *YM*, with articles on hockey, ice-climbing, and life in Homer, Alaska. At press time, *Jump* survives, but the future of its grown-up counterparts is uncertain at best. Condé Nast kicked off the monthly Condé Nast *Sports for Women*, a women's life-style magazine about sports, only to buy *Women's Sports and Fitness* four months later and announce that it will fold the two into one bimonthly — clearly a less ambitious project. Time Inc. floated two test issues of *Sports Illustrated Woman/Sport* (essentially *Sports Illustrated* with a sex change) but has indefinitely postponed the launch.

For one thing, advertising was questionable. Beauty and fashion features prime the reader's material desires; reading a women's magazine really does make you want to go out and buy lipstick. That is why advertisers love women's magazines, and why any deviation from the formulas is seen as a risk.

Advertising also limits the potential success of men's magazines. Though products for men — from insoles that make you look taller to anti-snoring gadgets — are steadily proliferating, there may never be as many things to sell to men as there are to women. Cohn, of *Media Industry Newsletter*, thinks men's magazines' financial potential has been "overhyped. Until more men are house husbands, it's a very limited advertising marketplace." He's probably right, but it sure looks like a good time to experiment: U.S. magazines, overall, pulled in $13 billion from ads last year, up 14 percent from 1996.

Meanwhile, every month it gets harder to separate the men from the girls. Did I read about snowboarding in *Jump*? *Men's Health*? *Condé Nast Sports for Women*? *Men's Journal*? *Maxim*? All of the above, actually. Increasingly, women and men — or focus groups representing us — want the same things: to stay fit, look good, have agreeable relationships and hot sex, and to worship celebrities with the appropriate degree of irony.

This winter I was beginning to make sense of all this when the newly launched issue of *Men Are From Mars and Women Are From Venus* appeared on my newsstand. Founded by John Gray, author of the best-selling book of the same dispiriting title, this new monthly seems to retort: snowboarding be damned. You have as much in common with a person of the opposite sex as you do with an extraterrestrial. It was a bleak vision, and even, perhaps, a harbinger of backlash.

But winter is over and I feel better. Here's the April *Details*, with all the dish on Courtney Love, not to mention Monica Lewinsky's high school friends. It may be too warm for snowboarding and ice-climbing, but it's never bad weather for gossip. ◆

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ESPN VS. *SPORTS ILLUSTRATED*

THE GAME IS ON



The magazine is not a clone of *Sports Illustrated*, a strategy that may well pay off.

BY PAT RYAN

The first issue of any magazine backed by big money and talent is, almost always, scrutinized and flayed. I was a senior editor at *Sports Illustrated* when *People* arrived in 1974 — to derision. And sixteen years later when Time Inc.'s next big horse, *Entertainment Weekly*, appeared, it was dismissed.

So don't make up your mind too quickly about *ESPN The Magazine*, even though its mastermind, John Walsh, the sports network's executive editor, says, "Most times it takes a year to define a magazine. But we are already what we are supposed to be."

Maybe. In size, paper stock, and attitude *ESPN* resembles *Spin* and *Vibe*, which have become editorial bibles for attracting GenXers, the target audience of the new biweekly. But the realities of the marketplace may chisel away at current theories about those readers. For instance, that earlier magazine aimed at twenty-somethings, *Entertainment Weekly*, quickly found the young preferred a less frantic design and type sizes that even the visually impaired (those over 40) could read.

Also open to re-examination in *ESPN* are paragraphs that vanish in a fog of multicolored inks and the bewildering, though occasionally stimulating, similarity of ad and edit illustration. The visual smorgasbord, which Walsh calls "movement on the pages," is the result of the magazine's striving to transfer video to the printed page.

Walsh explains, "Even our long pieces — we had three articles of 3,000 words or more in the first issue — are storytelling done the way we would do it in a good long television piece; they move quickly." Among Walsh's demands: coverage of extreme sports (surfing El Nino, snowboarding), humor ("sport is too important to be taken seriously"), and short bursts of text reflecting the magazine's video orientation and GenXers' attention span.

For every first-issue weakness in *ESPN* there is a latent strength: boldness that is refreshing, a distinctive voice that will develop quickly, and access to proven writing talent. *ESPN*'s editor-in-chief John Papanek was a longtime *Sports Illustrated* staffer who ran the magazine between 1990 and 1992. He understands, for example, that action photography is an *SI* trademark and is purposely downplaying in-your-face pictures in *ESPN*, arguing "The best action has already been shown on TV, in replays, and slow-motion. You aren't going to beat what is shot by minicams in a goalie's skates. The fan has already seen that." In fact, Papanek seems to be developing his own photographic style, using vivid portraits.



Editor Papanek

Of the two publications, *ESPN* will surely be the less conventional, reflecting the diversity in its generation of readers and of sports today. A Babel of superstars from the Baltic, Eastern Europe, Latin America, Australia, Asia, and Africa now appears on college and professional rosters and in world rankings.

To get the stories of minorities, *ESPN* will take risks: in the first issue, Papanek assigned a feature on the NBA's controversial Latrell Sprewell to a young African-American journalist who had been on an L.A. alternative weekly. The result: a telling but journalistically soft piece. *SI* had a more potent take on the same subject the following week — a photograph of the red-ringed neck of the coach whom Sprewell throttled in anger.

As long as *ESPN* maintains its current publishing frequency, it is not the editorial quality of the magazine that will be the challenge to the weekly *SI*. Instead, it is the vast power of the ESPN company and its aggressive owner, Disney. (Hearst owns 20 percent of this new venture.) *ESPN* has the capacity to publicize its magazine's stories on the network's four, round-the-clock TV channels, 420-plus radio affiliates and ESPN SportsZone, one of the most visited sites on the Web. The network already has renamed a radio slot the *ESPN Sunday Morning Magazine* and can be expected to do more of the same on its TV channels.

The threat of a significant competitor led *SI* to do a questionable redesign last winter. *Sports Illustrated* now could blunder if it overreacts, striving to be something it isn't in a misguided effort to drop the age of its reader from the current 36 toward *ESPN*'s projected 29.

Where the magazines will be at loggerheads is in the battle to get access to big names for major stories. Michael Jordan gave ninety minutes and a bylined cover story to *ESPN* for its second issue. Jordan's relationship with *SI* has been strained since its stinging coverage of his year in minor-league baseball.

Another indicator of *ESPN*'s clout: *Sports Illustrated* has gotten an estimated 300,000 to 450,000 subscribers a year by advertising on the network. Faced with

Pat Ryan worked for eighteen years for Sports Illustrated. *Subsequently she became the managing editor of* People *and* Life.

OPINION

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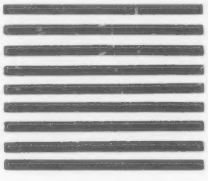
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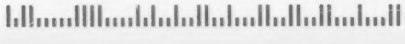
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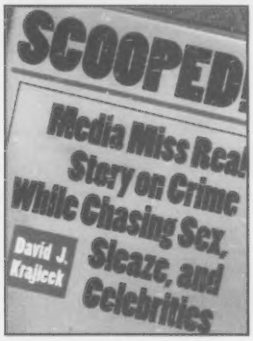
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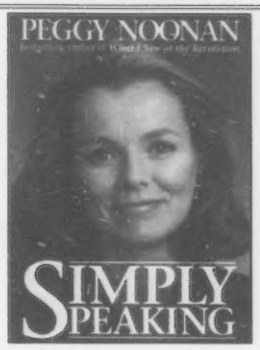
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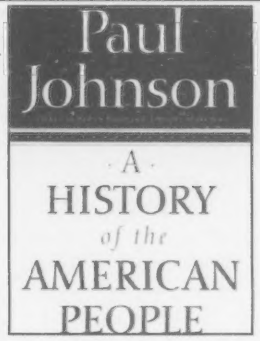
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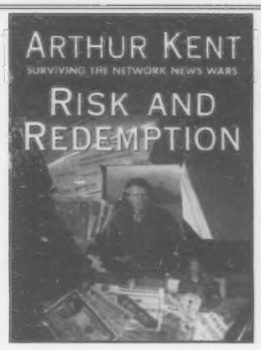
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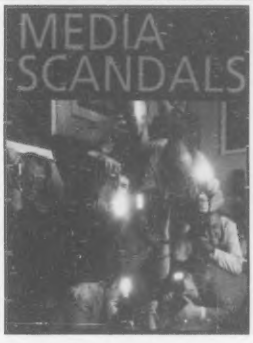
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sizable churn in its readership, *SI* knows ESPN is its best source of new bodies to maintain its 3.15 million circulation base. It has little choice but to advertise on ESPN, where reportedly it costs *SI* about $35 to sign up a subscriber. But now the network has stopped giving *SI* the choice advertising spots. (ESPN claims it gets subscribers for its magazine on the network for $15 to $20 each.)

ESPN launched with a modest 350,000 guaranteed circulation (*SI* started with 450,000 in 1954) and helped by the ESPN brand name may well exceed its promised 700,000 by year's end. A publication spawned by a popular TV show has stunning potential: it took *This Old House* magazine only fifteen issues to reach a 525,000 circulation, thanks to the PBS series. By comparison, ESPN is a multimedia powerhouse.

Fifteen years ago *SI*'s best writers commanded the locker room at major events, and athletes coveted being on the cover of the magazine. Now ESPN, with its on-camera personalities and highlights show, has that cachet. *Sports Illustrated*'s television presence is limited to CNN/SI, a news channel.

The older magazine's new president, Mike Klingensmith, is taking a wait-and-see attitude about his print rival. "*SI* has 12 million readers between 18 and 24," he says. "I believe sports is ageless. I read the same things at 12 that I do today. I am not sure the notion that there is a special way to write or design for the young is right."

Meanwhile his publishing counterpart at *ESPN*, John Skipper, is selling the notion to advertisers that with its new venture ESPN has become "the principal source of sports entertainment. Print completes our ubiquity. The magazine can take advantage of the network's stature and newsgathering resources. We have 350 people in broadcast working around the country. These are respected journalists. So instead of having just fifty people on the magazine staff, John Papanek has 400." That, of itself, would give *ESPN The Magazine* more than a sporting chance of making good.

Corporate synergy has been the hollow rallying cry of many media megacompanies in the past decade. ESPN is a notable success in achieving what others just talk about. This is the primary reason why its magazine demands attention. ◆

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INDIA

TV WINS THE ELECTIONS

This year's all-out coverage redefined Indian journalism

It was labeled India's first television elections. The world's largest democracy followed the sights and sounds of Election '98 on nearly a dozen satellite channels, including BBC, CNN, and the nation's domestic, government-sponsored network, Doordarshan, reaching an estimated total viewership of 400 million. They saw politicians being grilled by the pollsters and television correspondents scrambling for exclusive pictures. They occupied ringside seats for acrimonious studio debates between party leaders.

It was all very different from India's last election less than twenty months ago when Doordarshan's primary channel, DD1, was the only network covering the battle for the ballot in any significant way. Back then, foreign satellite channels had trouble covering the hustings because the Indian government restricted their access to uplink facilities.

Doordarshan still had the numbers and the resources on its side this time around: 330 million viewers, more than half of the India's voting public; twelve production centers and a national computer network that enabled it to broadcast voting results one hour before its competitors. On its two channels, DD1 and DD Metro, the network aired 130 hours of election-related programming during the three days that votes were tabulated. In India, counting votes is done manually.

But for these elections, the government relaxed its chokehold on satellite uplinks for eight weeks, allowing some channels known for their family programming (Sony Entertainment Television, TVi) to hop onto the news bandwagon. And although the advertising pie was stretched and shared across forty-odd cable and satellite channels, two twenty-four-hour news networks made their debut. First off the block was Zee India TV, which had morphed from an existing entertainment channel that customarily aired one news bulletin daily. During the elections, it was broadcasting more than thirty news-related programs a day.

The other round-the-clock channel, Star News, is the latest addition to the Murdoch-owned Star TV network that beams over India. Contractually, Star News's programming is created by New Delhi Television (NDTV), one of India's leading production houses. While the votes were being counted, Star News and its sister channel Star Plus offered non-stop coverage of the results. A political telethon kept candidates careering from one studio to another. News anchors like Prannoy Roy of NDTV camped in their TV studios for twenty-four hours at a stretch.

Around the country, the pace was as frenzied. In south India, regional channels such as Sun TV, ETV, and Asianet (combined viewership: 10 million) introduced extra news bulletins into their daily schedules. "Not since the 1991 gulf war, when the cable and satellite supernova brought that conflict into the drawing rooms of India, was a nation so riveted," says Kakani Dharmaraju, deputy director of the Center for Media Studies in New Delhi.

Television's wall-to-wall coverage redefined the scope of Indian journalism. Normally taciturn politicians, realizing the immediacy and the impact of TV, became instantly available. They began to understand that live, two-minute sound bites were easier to control than pesky press conferences. Sonia Gandhi, the Italian-born wife of India's late prime minister, Rajiv Gandhi, campaigning to revive the flagging fortunes of the Congress party gave her only interview — albeit a brief one — to Star News.

From being the brash, elbow-jutting pariahs of Indian journalism, television newspeople suddenly became acceptable conduits to the people. A correspondent with *Aaj Tak*, a daily news bulletin broadcast on DD, noticed that print journalist



Members of the Bharatiya Janata Party campaigned hard to establish India, officially, as a Hindu state.

THE WORLD/WILLIAM WHITEHURST/THE STOCK MARKET. INDIA/ROBERT NICKELSBERG/GAMMA

unable to buttonhole politicians would happily use information given to television reporters as "background" or simply tag along with TV crews to meet an elusive source.

Faced with the prospect that television for the first time would beat them at their own game, print reporters reoriented themselves. Some national papers like *The Times of India* (circulation: 1.3 million) stuck with their old ways of reporting on the day's campaigning, but others like *The Indian Express* began leaning heavily on investigative stories. The Delhi-based *Pioneer* resorted to graphic techniques -- front-page photographs of politicians flanked by television screen-shaped bubbles containing their statements made on TV. For their part, Hindi dailies like *Rashtria Sahara* started using oversized color pictures.

The newsmagazines, too, reacted. The country's leading English-language weekly *India Today* (circulation: 650,000) prepared two special issues in advance. "We realized six weeks before the elections that it was no use repeating what television was covering," said executive editor Prabhu Chawla. "So we devoted two entire issues to profiling little-known candidates and reporting lesser-known facts about the main protagonists."

"Television's election coverage set the pace for us and we had to respond to that," said Vinod Mehta, editor-in-chief of *Outlook* (circulation: 93,000). His feisty political weekly magazine was obliged to look at the bigger picture: why certain states voted they way they did; what issues were vital to which castes — matters that the small screen could not delve into as effectively. In an attempt to make India's political system more accountable, *Outlook* even initiated a citizen's campaign listing candidates having criminal records.

In a country where literacy stands at only 52 percent, the impact of television on the grass-roots polity could only be imagined. The pundits spoke of the beginning of an era of tele-democracy — a time when the small screen would substitute completely for a candidate's guts-and-gore rally speech. They pointed to how villagers near the small town of Betul were suddenly speaking of "vote swings" and "incumbency factors" using vintage TV pollster jargon.

Cable subscriptions increased dramatically, especially in smaller towns. A survey conducted by the Center for Media Studies revealed that while 32 percent of the people in a rural pocket of Andhra Pradesh, a state in South India, had heard of Sonia Gandhi through the medium of newspapers, as many as 49 percent had heard of her through television. The voter turnout suggests that TV coverage caused voter awareness to peak: 62.2 percent of eligible voters turned out in 1998's mid-term elections, up from 56.5 percent in full-term races in 1996.

Nonetheless, television's coverage emphasized sound bites. Admitted anchorman Roy: "In India, politics is like sports. It's all about who wins, who loses, not about issues." The announcing of the results did, in fact, take on the tone of a cricket match. In finding out who scored the most runs, Indian TV journalism was in danger of drifting into the quagmire of trivialization. Very few programs treated the crucial issues: population control, poverty, literacy. Instead most channels pitted one politician against another, creating instant celebrities out of those most articulate and telegenic. And few news presenters challenged official lines or analyzed shifts in party agendas.

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Supporters brandished posters of Sonia Gandhi, the widow of India's late prime minister, Rajiv Gandhi.

A worse transgression was politically motivated coverage. In the south Indian city of Chennai, Sun TV openly supported the party in power while a rival channel, Vijay TV, propped up the opposition. ETV's coverage from Hyderabad had a noticeable tilt toward its state government, as did Asianet's approach to the United Left Front, the party in power in its home state of Kerala.

Sadly it was not only the privately owned channels that were not playing fair. Objective reporting was scarce in Doordarshan's coverage, even though it's funded by taxpayers' money and expected to be evenhanded. As the votes were being counted, the English language program *India Decides* on DD 2 threatened to destroy the channel's neutral mandate with its shrill bias toward the Bharatiya Janata Party, making Muslim viewers grow apprehensive. (A main plank of the right-wing BJP, or the Indian National Party, is its open support for making India, officially, a Hindu state). The discussions on DD2 led viewers to think that the BJP had received a resounding mandate, which was not the case. The anchors crudely rode roughshod over anyone questioning that assumption. "It was information manipulation at its worst," says Imtiaz Ahmed, a political analyst at Jawaharlal Nehru University.

For better or worse, Indian elections have entered the television era. For the world's largest democracy, there can be no going back.

Mannika Chopra is the New Delhi bureau chief of Calcutta's The Telegraph.



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Hey, Hey, LBJ: How Many Journalists Did You Tape Today?

by Gloria Cooper

It's the Monday morning of John F. Kennedy's funeral, and the new occupant of the Oval Office is on the phone with Joseph Alsop, leaning on the powerful *Washington Post* columnist to oppose his paper's editorial call for a blue-ribbon commission to investigate the assassination in Dallas (the president prefers that the inquiry be handled by the state of Texas and the FBI). A few days later Jesse Kellam, general manager of the president's broadcasting company in Texas, calls to let him know that *The Boston Globe* is looking into the family's business holdings (which present a potential conflict of interest in future FCC appointments), as well as to offer a couple of tips on improving his TV image (consider rimless glasses and go easy on the hair oil). That Sunday evening, the president phones Walter Lippmann, the *Washington Post* columnist of unparalleled influence, and invites himself over for a drink.

TAKING CHARGE:
THE JOHNSON WHITE HOUSE TAPES, 1963-1964
EDITED AND WITH COMMENTARY BY MICHAEL R. BESCHLOSS
SIMON & SCHUSTER
591 PP., $30

The following morning he appeals to Katharine Graham, recently installed head of *The Washington Post*, to put the squeeze on congressional opponents of his civil rights bill by running embarrassing stories about their vacations. "They're not *working* now! And they are not passing anything! And they are not going to!," the frustrated president complains to Graham. "So I'd like for them [the *Post* editors] to be asking these fellows, 'Where did you spend your Thanksgiving holidays? Tell me about it, was it warm and nice?' And write a little story on it."

And that's just the first *week*. As becomes increasingly clear in *Taking Charge*, the riveting transcripts of White House conversations secretly recorded by President Lyndon B. Johnson during his first nine months in office, the press was a palpable presence in LBJ's world, almost as close to the center of his consciousness as the threat of Bobby Kennedy.

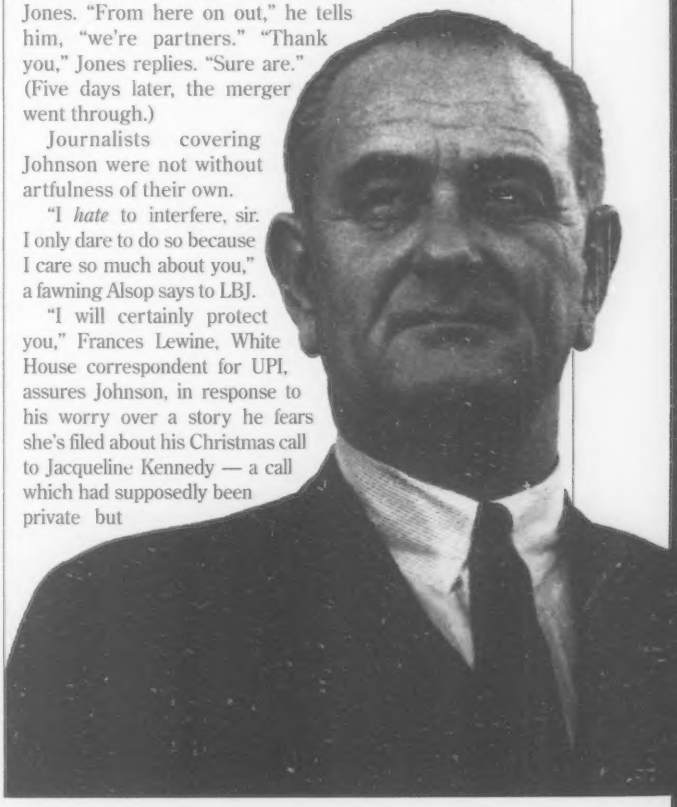
Media manipulation came as naturally to Johnson as his Texas drawl. He knew how to tug at the heartstrings — during that conversation with Kay Graham, whose husband Phil was a suicide only four months before, he could shamelessly sigh, "If you'd just go up in heaven, get him, bring him back where he could sit and advise with me awhile. But it's so difficult . . . " (Johnson's efforts didn't always work: Michael Beschloss, the historian who ably edited and annotated the transcripts, observes that while Graham passed along to her editors "the gist" of LBJ's suggestion for congressional-vacation stories, she stopped short of asking them to follow it up, thinking it "ridiculous.")

He knew, too, how to pull on the pursestrings. Pressed by financial backer George Brown, chairman of Brown & Root, to approve a merger of two Houston banks sought by John Jones, president of the *Houston Chronicle*, Johnson proposes a quid pro quo: "I want John Jones to write me a letter . . . saying, 'Mr. President . . . I just want you to know that we're making arrangements for special coverage in Washington for the *Chronicle* . . . and that so far as I'm personally concerned and the paper's concerned, it's going to support your administration as long as you're there. Sincerely, your friend, John Jones.'" When Johnson gets the letter he wants, he phones Jones. "From here on out," he tells him, "we're partners." "Thank you," Jones replies. "Sure are." (Five days later, the merger went through.)

Journalists covering Johnson were not without artfulness of their own.

"I *hate* to interfere, sir. I only dare to do so because I care so much about you," a fawning Alsop says to LBJ.

"I will certainly protect you," Frances Lewine, White House correspondent for UPI, assures Johnson, in response to his worry over a story he fears she's filed about his Christmas call to Jacqueline Kennedy — a call which had supposedly been private but



FRED WARD

Gloria Cooper is CJR*'s managing editor.*

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which in fact he had invited four women reporters to listen in on.

Hearst correspondent Marianne Means, chatting with Johnson after interviewing his relatives in Texas, gushes, "I loved [your sister]. I loved all of them . . . I really went for Cousin Oriole . . . I certainly enjoyed them. I loved your sister Becky. Gee."

Slobbers Marshall McNeil, reporter for Scripps Howard, "I just thought you were cuter than a pig on that television last night . . . I get prouder of you — damn your ornery hide, Mr. President — day by day."

Mutual stroking aside, in the Johnson White House monitoring of the press went on without pause. If not all members of the fourth estate were cultivated quite as carefully as the princely Lippmann, Alsop, and *The New York Times*'s James Reston, their work was no less carefully watched. To pick just two from the passing parade of famous bylines:

"Let's don't ever invite a newspaperman to come in for any reason. Let's just keep them at arm's distance."

Times reporter Tad Szulc, whose Latin America scoops suggest a State Department leak. ("We may have to put a tail on this man," Secretary Dean Rusk tells LBJ. "But then if we get caught doing that, it's going to be rough.") And *Time*'s Hugh Sidey, called on the Oval Office carpet for talking to press secretary George Reedy about a possible piece touting new LBJ adviser Richard Goodwin, the chief writer of the acclaimed "Great Society" speech. ("It doesn't make any difference," LBJ sanctimoniously lectures Sidey, "but I just want to show you that somebody is trying to appear important to you, and I resent that to hell. People . . . ought to be working. That's not their job to spend their time telling *Time* about who does what. *I'll* tell 'em, if they want to know.")

LBJ's reaction to perceived mistreatment at the hands of the press ranged from bitterness and anger to self-pity and bafflement. Alerted that *The Wall Street Journal* is in hot pursuit of the family's business records, he muses to confidante Edwin Weisl, "I'm more conservative than any man they've had in twenty years. Why they want to be getting me?" Irritated by criticism of his Washington press conferences, he grumbles to Paul Miller, chairman of the board of The Associated Press: "When I sat down, they said I ought to stand up. When I stood up, they said I ought to sit down. When I had it in the State Department, Mary McGrory said the room was too dark. When I had it in the East Room, they said it was too light. And I don't give a damn. Just so it is comfortable for them."

Stung by a negative *New York Times* editorial after what he'd thought was a positive meeting with its editorial board, Johnson unburdens himself to Scripps Howard's McNeil. "I told [press secretary] Pierre Salinger, 'Let's don't ever invite a newspaperman to come in for any reason. Let's just keep them at arm's distance." (Solace comes from Texas pal and syndicated columnist William S. White. "*The Washington Post* and *The New York Times* never do speak for the American press, Mr. President. Almost never.")

In August 1964, as this first volume in Beschloss's projected series reaches its end, party delegates are already convening in Atlantic City when Johnson tells Reedy of his plan to announce that he is "absolutely unavailable" as their presidential nominee. "I look at the *Herald Tribune*. There's nothing but the things that we've done terrible. I read *The New York Times*. We had a 'pallid platform.' That's outrageous. I picked up every paper I had this morning, and we'd just played hell . . . . The nation ought to have a chance to get the best available. That's who I want *my* children to have. And I know that I'm not." (The press secretary talks him out of it.)

Journalists and other cynics will no doubt be reminding themselves that every utterance Johnson recorded was made in his full knowledge of the secret tape. Still, the feelings seem genuine enough.

Fastening on the larger issues of civil rights, Vietnam, and the shaping of the 1964 Democratic ticket, the scores of reviews published in newspapers and magazines all across the country have left virtually untouched this most inside of inside stories about a president and the press. The omission is surprising. Or maybe not.

McCurry's Mission

by James Warren

Presidential spokesman Mike McCurry is, according to Howard Kurtz's perversely intriguing dissection of the White House "spin machine," a master of that self-serving tactical mainstay, the leak. His handiwork became especially vivid just before last year's State of the Union address.

Page-one exclusives appeared in *USA Today* heralding a $5 billion Clinton proposal to renovate schools and another on getting tough on school truants. *The New York Times* revealed a Clinton plan to track by computer illegal gun sales to youth, while ABC's Peter Jennings reported on an upcoming Clinton radio address on kids and cigarettes. "Marginal stories that would barely rate a mention on television were pumped up by virtue of being exclusive," Kurtz writes. "McCurry enjoyed parceling out these juicy tidbits, even though competing news organizations often got mad at him for doing it."



AP WIDE/WORLD/WILFREDO LEE

Press secretary McCurry at a daily briefing

But if reporters feel short-changed by such media management, the White House, as Kurtz shows, is convinced that it is essential to advancing the agenda of the president. That helps explain why press junkies and celebrity mavens, if not serious students of public policy or the Clinton presidency, will find a feast here.

Spin Cycle unwittingly details the professional humiliation attendant upon covering the president. On many days, the White House reporter is not much more than a well-compensated stenographer. Little reporting gets done since there is little to be done, given the mania for control within the White House and the willingness of only a precious few officials to speak, on any basis. The media mob, as one is reminded here (again unintentionally), fights over morsels.

On the other side, there is the White House's obsession with a certain few — notably the major TV and cable networks and *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, The Associated Press, and *USA Today*, and its reflexive penchant for reacting to anything vaguely negative. That is nowhere better in evidence than in the many pages focusing on the frenetic atmosphere surrounding the allegations of campaign finance abuse by the Clinton-Gore campaign. The White House was in daily crisis management, constantly feeling victimized and convulsed by the latest disclosure of possible wrongdoing. Should it fork over certain documents and, if so, how should it dampen their importance? Will dumping thousands of pages on a press corps both voracious and afflicted with a short attention span result in heavy, but fleeting, damage, or days of painful revelations culled from the reams of paper? (Most of Kurtz's book covers the period before the days of painful revelations about the Monica Lewinsky mess, but Kurtz has managed, in a hastily added epilogue, to capture the early, frantic White House spin.)

One gains an improved understanding of why so many big issues affecting society aren't confronted; the policy makers drown in daily predicaments. How can you fret over long-term messes like Social Security when you seem more concerned with rebutting an overheated wire-service disclosure or on getting a "two-day bounce" on a longshot school-renovation program by leaking it to *USA Today* for a big Monday hit, forcing everybody to re-cover it on Tuesday?

Thus one finds top adviser Rahm Emanuel feeling compelled to call the networks each morning to sniff out what they're working on for their big evening newscasts. Campaign-finance damage control specialist Lanny Davis makes a purported social call to the home of a *Newsweek* reporter as he seeks to discern what the reporter is investigating in the Paula Jones case.

"This is so reckless!" the top economic adviser Gene Sperling yells at a *Washington Post* reporter. "This is so irresponsible! I can't believe you wrote such a thing!" The reporter's sin: giving allegedly insufficient credit to Clinton for the robust state of the economy in an article on the declining budget deficit. Chill out, Gene baby.

Kurtz captures the public relations staff's own cajoling of a president who is deeply cynical of the media and who correctly finds Republican campaign indiscretions getting distinctly less play than his own. The staff beseeches him to schmooze the media and, indeed, when certain columnists are beckoned to the Oval Office, their subsequent writings tend to be effusive. "He seems increasingly confident that he is synthesizing a nuanced blend of government activism and reform," writes one.

SPIN CYCLE: INSIDE THE CLINTON PROPAGANDA MACHINE
BY HOWARD KURTZ
THE FREE PRESS
325 PP. $25

But at least they got to quote Clinton. The rhetorical self-imprisonment agreed to regularly by White House reporters is evident after an "off-the-record session"

James Warren is Washington bureau chief for the Chicago Tribune.

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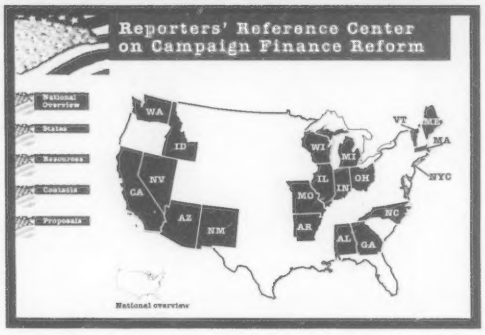
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with the president. They begged for a pittance. "McCurry finally cut a deal in which seven items could be used but without attributing them to Clinton. The reporters could say "The president has told friends . . . " or "The president is known to believe . . . ." It is yet another example of a benign conspiracy between reporters and newsmakers to keep the truth from readers and viewers. Of such concessions are careers, and bloated self-images of tough-minded independence, made.

But, sadly, this book is depressing and claustrophobic, as enclosed as the cramped pressroom itself. Kurtz proves here to be an unwitting captive of much of the conventional wisdom that the two sides themselves myopically buy into.

He accepts as an article of faith that controlling the elite media is key for a president. In spinning the horde, as flack-with-honor McCurry clearly spins Kurtz, a president can gain. At the same time, he accepts the pack's conclusion that Clinton is a poll-driven trickster, lurching from small initiative to small initiative. If they knew how "detailed these polls were," they would be "even more dismissive of Clinton's market-tested approach to governing." He thus assumes that if Clinton routinely seeks out the views of his constituents, something must be wrong. Why in a democracy should staying in such constant touch be a sign of weakness?

In short, there is a mutual delusion. The White House is caught up in what the press corps believes is reality and feels compelled to respond. If Wolf Blitzer is on the front lawn reporting something as true, it must be reckoned with. The president's men forget the limits of the media's endeavors, the fact that many Americans' responses to Clinton may have little to do with what is reported on a given day by Blitzer or anybody else. Meanwhile, the press itself won't acknowledge that Clinton has perhaps connected with people based on the same small initiatives and that there may be a substantive basis to their liking him beyond the protective shield of a booming economy. Policy, not spin, may actually be paramount.

In the end, Kurtz might have listened more closely to presidential aide Don Baer, a former journalist who tells him that he "believed that the White House spent way too much time worrying about the next day's headlines. In the end, he was convinced, it didn't matter all that much what the Washington reporters said." Wise words.

As Good As It Gets

by Lance Morrow

Early in the relationship, William Shawn told Ved Mehta softly, "I'm afraid we are going to have comma trouble."

It seems that Mehta, then a young writer, thought that commas are used in a sentence merely to signal a natural pause. Shawn explained that they are for meaning. Being a sort of editorial saint, Shawn seemed ready to give Mehta an explanation for every comma in the 13,000-word piece.

Mehta came to understand commas. The relationship prospered. Shawn, the diffident, meticulous wizard who presided over *The New Yorker* from 1951 to 1987 — from the death of Harold Ross to the early days of the new ownership under S.I. Newhouse — brought Mehta onto the staff and indulged and encouraged him for nearly three decades, publishing his pieces, and even trudging out himself at one point to beat the streets of Manhattan, seeking a suitable apartment for Mehta. It's hard to find editors like that these days.

Lance Morrow is an essayist for Time *and University Professor at Boston University.*

Shawn's *New Yorker* gave Mehta, an Indian-born writer, blind from the age of four, a home, an amanuensis, a drawing account, a handsome editorial platform, and what was more valuable than all of those, an ideal editor. Shawn presided over a stable that included A. J. Liebling, Edmund Wilson, John Cheever, John Updike, J.D. Salinger, among others. Most of those experts considered Shawn — unfailingly courteous, generous, fastidious, punctilious — the best magazine editor in the world. His rule was absolute but, strangely, he had no ego. He nourished and tolerated and brought to bloom an astonishing collection of difficult writers — geniuses, recluses, neurotics, drunks.



JAMES STEVENSON

Editor William Shawn: "partner in a search for truth"

It takes the reader a few pages to get used to Mehta's tone of Shawn-worship. "Under his inspired guidance, I was learning that a writer and an editor had a higher calling than self-glorification — that they were partners in a search for truth." After a two-hour editing session on the telephone, talking through the snags and kinks in one of many versions of a piece making its way toward the printer like a young Jesuit scholastic on an arduous twelve-year journey to the

REMEMBERING MR. SHAWN'S NEW YORKER: THE INVISIBLE ART OF EDITING
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priesthood, Mehta thanked Shawn and remarked that now the piece belonged as much to the editor as to the writer. To which Shawn replied with the perfect editor's metaphysical conceit: "No, it belongs to you — I just made it more yours."

But the reader of *Remembering Mr. Shawn's New Yorker* accepts Mehta's reverence for the subject, and even shares it. Writers and editors should read Mehta's book for its account of Shawn's style of editing — a sort of perfectionist self-effacement, a passion to get it right, an intelligent respect for the writer on the one hand and the reader on the other. "Does it work?" Shawn would ask himself, understanding perfectly what a goal of excellence is concentrated in that word "work." "Rather like a Talmudic scholar," Mehta writes, "he responded to any piece of writing on the basis of close reading and mastery of the text." His editing was grounded in a reverence for language and thought.

Shawn also knew that a great magazine must be made from the inside out, not the other way around. It must have an inner life; its editors must know what they want, and stand for something, and not merely respond to focus groups and other market research. There is always a fatal lag-time in pandering, anyway: by the time a magazine has caught up with what the market research seemed to say, the readers will have moved on, and so the pandering magazine merely contributes to the smudged impression of general dumbness.

Maybe Shawn was spoiled by *The New Yorker*'s opulence of ad pages. He sometimes overindulged boring writers, including, on occasion, Mehta himself. But since his vocation was pure, he could look back over the magazine's performance and say, "We were getting out the best magazine we knew how, with no concessions to fashion or popular taste . . . . *The New Yorker* has been a miracle, but it is a miracle that can be extinguished."

The New Yorker was not, of course, extinguished when Shawn was fired by the new management. The magazine changed in ways that grieve Ved Mehta, as the Earl of Kent was disturbed to see the kingdom taken over by Goneril and Regan. Shawn, however, was never Lear. He was more a kind of Yoda in a realm of words. ◆

Excerpts

BAD NEWS IS NO NEWS

FROM **THE CHILDREN**, BY DAVID HALBERSTAM. RANDOM HOUSE. 800 PP. $29.95.

There is a good deal of talk about journalistic political correctness these days, and political correctness is odious in any form. It should be noted, however, that there was an old political correctness in those [early days of the civil



Halberstam on April 19, 1960, as he covered a confrontation on the Nashville courthouse steps

rights movement in the 1960s], and it was both very powerful and very pernicious. The key to the old political correctness was in the skillful use of silence at critical times. Under the old journalistic political correctness, as manifested through the South, when blacks gave any demonstration of grievance, there was a decision by consensus — the ruling white oligarchy of the town in concert with the editor of the paper — to take either no note of what had happened, or to write a tiny inoffensive story and bury it somewhere in the middle of the paper. If black heads had been cracked during a protest demonstration, then it was still unlikely to make the paper. Thus blacks were faced with taking great risks in trying to change things, all too aware that even as they tried, the local authorities might take no note at all of their grievances, and the community would be spared any reports on what had happened.

Halberstam is the author of nine best-selling books, including The Best and the Brightest *and* The Powers That Be.

WHEN THE CAMERA VIOLATES

FROM **PRIVATE MATTERS: IN DEFENSE OF THE PERSONAL LIFE**, BY JANNA MALAMUD SMITH. ADDISON-WESLEY. 278 PP. $22.

One evening after a large Los Angeles earthquake, I turn on the television news. The story begins innocuously enough with the footage of a twisted freeway filmed from a circling helicopter. We see rubble, destroyed buildings, fires, broken water mains, and listen to residents recount ordeals. The scene shifts. We are at the site of an attempted rescue. An apartment has collapsed, and men and bulldozers are digging in the rubble. They have just found the body of a woman's only child, her daughter. The woman is out of sight, and then she comes into the camera frame, screaming.

I expect the camera to offer us one look at her and then cut away. But it does not. She is wearing a gray pantsuit and sunglasses, and she cannot stop running and screaming. Her husband tries to grab her and pull her into his arms, but her grief is so intense, her body cannot allow itself to be held still. A man at the scene stands looking away from her, his reserve intuitively granting her the privacy that the camera refuses to offer. I look away and back, in my mind telling them to stop, and finally when she settles for a moment in her husband's arms, the screen cuts back to the somber faces of our local news anchors.

As I go to bed, I cannot shake the profound trauma of a woman I have never met. Does the television news editor feel I must see her to understand that earthquake? Her grief is vivid and somehow timeless. She looks like a mother would look. Parents digging children out of the ash around Pompeii two thousand years ago would know just how she felt. The horror of the event is vividly transmitted. But there is something wrong with witnessing the intimate traumas of people we don't hold close. Violating her privacy by allowing the camera to defy reserve, we violate a collective standard of honoring life and death by shielding people when their suffering is extreme.

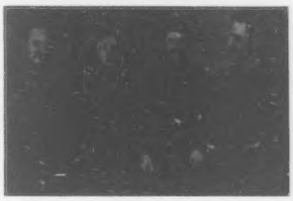
Smith, the daughter of the writer Bernard Malamud, is a psychotherapist.

WHEN PICTURES LIE

FROM **THE COMMISSAR VANISHES: THE FALSIFICATION OF PHOTOGRAPHS AND ART IN STALIN'S RUSSIA**, BY DAVID KING. HENRY HOLT AND COMPANY. 192 PP. $35.



This group shot (above), taken at the Fourteenth Party Conference in April 1925, was to become a classic example of Stalinist photographic manipulation. Only one of Stalin's comrades in this picture would die from natural causes.



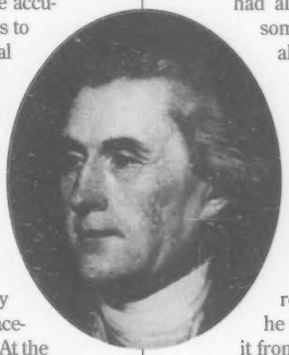
The same photograph (left), published in two biographies of Stalin that appeared in 1939 and 1949, has been retouched and rearranged to reduce the group to four. Sixty percent of those present at the 1925 meeting were erased from history.

King is a former art editor of the London Sunday Times.

ET TU, THOMAS?

FROM **AMERICAN SPHINX: THE CHARACTER OF THOMAS JEFFERSON**, BY JOSEPH J. ELLIS. ALFRED A. KNOPF. 365 PP. $26.

While the scar on Jefferson's reputation [from his alleged affair with the slave Sally Hemings,] never went away, and the New England Federalists did their best to keep the accusations alive in the public press, even going so far as to put the matter of Jefferson's character on the official agenda of the Massachusetts legislature, the political damage to his presidency proved less serious than the lingering stigma that attached itself to his image with posterity. The damage control teams in the Republican press helped the cause, Jefferson's posture of total silence on the matter prevented any prolonged debate from feeding on itself and, most significant, the steady string of Republican successes — the debt was being retired, taxes were being eliminated, the economy was humming along nicely, half a continent was peacefully acquired — simply crowded out the bad news. At the height of the Sally stories, John Quincy Adams suggested that the Federalists were forced to resort to such scandalmongering because the political program had been "completely and irrevocably abandoned and rejected by the popular voice." Whatever alarm Jefferson's supporters felt, he observed, would prove to be short-lived. "What they take for breakers," Adams noted, "are mere clouds of unsubstantiated vapour." This became Jefferson's public position as well. The frantic behavior of the Federalist press was symptomatic of its utter desperation, he insisted, as its cause slid beneath the surface of American politics forever. The Federalists were simply clutching at dirt as they went under.



But the experience took its toll on Jefferson's view of the American press. Jefferson wanted the press to be free, but he had also presumed that a free press would maintain some measure of respect for the truth. The free-for-all mentality and ricochet style of the multiplying newspapers allowed him to persuade himself that the very principle of freedom of the press was being destroyed by its excesses. "This is a dangerous state of things," he explained to Thomas McKean of Pennsylvania, "and the press ought to be restored to its credibility if possible." Governors McKean in Pennsylvania and De Witt Clinton in New York took the suggestion as a command to release their lawyers on the most recalcitrant Federalist editors. As Jefferson saw it, he was not violating a principle so much as rescuing it from its own abusive and self-destructive tendencies. But it was clearly at least a half step backward from his earlier incantations to unbridled freedom of speech.

Ellis is the Ford Foundation Professor of History at Mount Holyoke College in Massachusetts.

Why *Midnight* May be Darker Than You Think

BY MARCEL DUFRESNE

When *Midnight in the Garden of Good and Evil* smashed the 186-week record in February for staying on *The New York Times* nonfiction best seller list, Random House tossed a gala party. The publisher wanted to toast author John Berendt and his fabulously successful book about the multiple trials of Jim Williams, a Savannah antiques dealer who killed Danny Hansford, his young bisexual lover.

Back at Mercer House in Savannah, where the shooting took place, Williams's sister entertained fantasies of a very different *Midnight* party. Her guest list: everyone in town who thinks something in *Midnight* is not accurate. Such a gathering could get crowded.

Since *Midnight* was published in 1994, much of Savannah society, high and low, has privately discussed and disputed details of Berendt's impressionistic blend of travelogue and murder mystery. But now some people depicted in the book are starting to publicly dispute their literary alter-egos and to claim that Berendt went way too far in embellishing characters and stories. A clearer picture of Berendt's writing method has been emerging, raising questions about whether the book belongs in the nonfiction category.

Berendt, played by John Cusack in the movie version, spent eight years working on *Midnight*. The *Esquire* columnist pegs his mystery to events before and after May 2, 1981, when the "darkly handsome" Williams (Kevin Spacey in the film) shot and killed Hansford, the hot-headed hustler (played by Jude Law) who worked for him. It took eight years and four trials for Williams to convince a jury that Hansford had tried to shoot him first. Williams was finally acquitted in May 1989. He died eight months later of heart problems (reported incorrectly as pneumonia in *Midnight*).

Not many people even in Savannah know it, but Berendt had a contract with Williams, formalizing Williams's cooperation with the author. Berendt declines to discuss the arrangement except to say that he gave Williams no control over his manuscript.

Some of the liberties Berendt took in the book stem from his decision to make himself a character in it and to put himself into scenes where he hadn't been present. The author didn't start serious reporting in Savannah until 1985, four years after Hansford's death. Yet he appears as a narrative character in many scenes set before then: in Mercer House during an angry tirade by Hansford; inside the courtroom at Williams's first two trials; at a midnight voodoo ritual, from which the book's title emerges.

Many such scenes are reported in minute detail, with transcript-like dialogue. Some reviewers were taken in. *The New York Times*, for instance, reported matter-of-factly in its March 1994 review that "six months after Mr. Berendt arrived, Williams was charged in the 1981 shooting."

Berendt has admitted to reconstructing scenes and fabricating dialogue ("rounding the corners to make a better narrative," he calls it) and other inventions. Except in his coverage of the Williams murder trials, he concedes that he sometimes used stories people told him without confirming details with other principals. Those oft-repeated stories, he says, give his book the "folkloric quality" he was striving for. Yet he insists the book is 99 percent true. Berendt dismisses critics who suggest his book isn't nonfiction as "uninformed" in the ways of literary journalism.

Author Berendt and the Savannah house he depicted in *Midnight in the Garden of Good and Evil*



CHRISTOPHER LITTLE/OUTLINE

Marcel Dufresne is associate professor of journalism at the University of Connecticut in Storrs.

But his methods have fueled the ongoing debate over the blending of fact and fiction. On WriterL, a computer forum, professional writers often criticize Berendt's approach. *The New York Times* recently reported a "quiet debate" at Random House, publishers of *Midnight*, "about whether tinkering with the truth is a form of literary robbery." (Berendt's editor, Ann Godoff, did not return calls).

Midnight supplies plenty of examples to debate. When he wanted a colorful aging socialite as a character, Berendt resurrected the late Helen Drexel, who actually had died in 1974, to create the foul-mouthed, gun-toting Serena Dawes. In the book Dawes and her beau, eccentric inventor Luther Driggers (a pseudonym for a real Savannah scientist), take the author on a hilarious outing to test some goldfish the inventor has been trying to make glow. The scientist says the outing never happened, even without the fictional Dawes.

At the very end of the book Berendt moves Williams's corpse several feet from where it was actually found, to place him "behind the desk in the very spot" where he would have fallen eight years earlier, had Hansford shot him dead (as Williams always insisted Hansford tried to do). Berendt concedes now that Williams was not found in the "very spot," but might have been if he'd fallen in a different direction.

Some of the people portrayed in the book, like Williams's attorney Sonny Seiler, defend Berendt's literary license. He doubts that Williams really believed in voodoo or ever visited a cemetery with Minerva the voodoo priestess. Berendt, he jokes, "would have to write another book to explain all the liberties" he took. But, Seiler says, much of *Midnight* "would be boring otherwise. Someone's got to put a spin on it."

In contrast, Williams's sister, Dorothy Kingery, a sociology professor, complains of "enormous liberties . . . the great blurring of fiction and nonfiction" and she claims the author "grossly exaggerated" her brother's reliance on voodoo during his trials. She confirms that her brother had a contract with Berendt, but declines to discuss its contents, including the financial details.

In his one-paragraph Author's Note, Berendt says that he has changed some names and descriptions of people "to protect their privacy." Then: "Though this is a work of nonfiction, I have taken certain storytelling liberties, particularly having to do with the timing of events. Where the narrative strays from strict nonfiction, my intention has been to remain faithful to the characters and to the essential drift of events as they really happened."

Such a broad definition of nonfiction irritated Berendt's earliest critic, R. Robin McDonald, a crime reporter for the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*. Assigned to review *Midnight* in 1994, she called *Midnight* "a less than honest book . . . one of those unattractive hybrids . . . loosely based on actual events."



Daniel Wattenberg of *The Weekly Standard* traveled to Savannah in 1996, intending to write what he calls "the story that everyone else was doing" about the tourism boom, but ended up producing a piece critical of *Midnight*'s ties to the facts. In particular, he says, Berendt misrepresented the sexual identity of a central character, Joe Odom, a piano-playing lawyer. Wattenberg says Berendt conceded this, and he was struck by how breezily the author downplayed the deception. Berendt calls Wattenberg's piece "wildly distorted," though he doesn't dispute its main points.

When it comes to his account of the Williams murder case, Berendt insists his reporting was meticulous and that he minimized the type of literary liberties found in the book's subplots. Yet some omissions and errors raise questions about how fairly Berendt portrayed the prosecution.

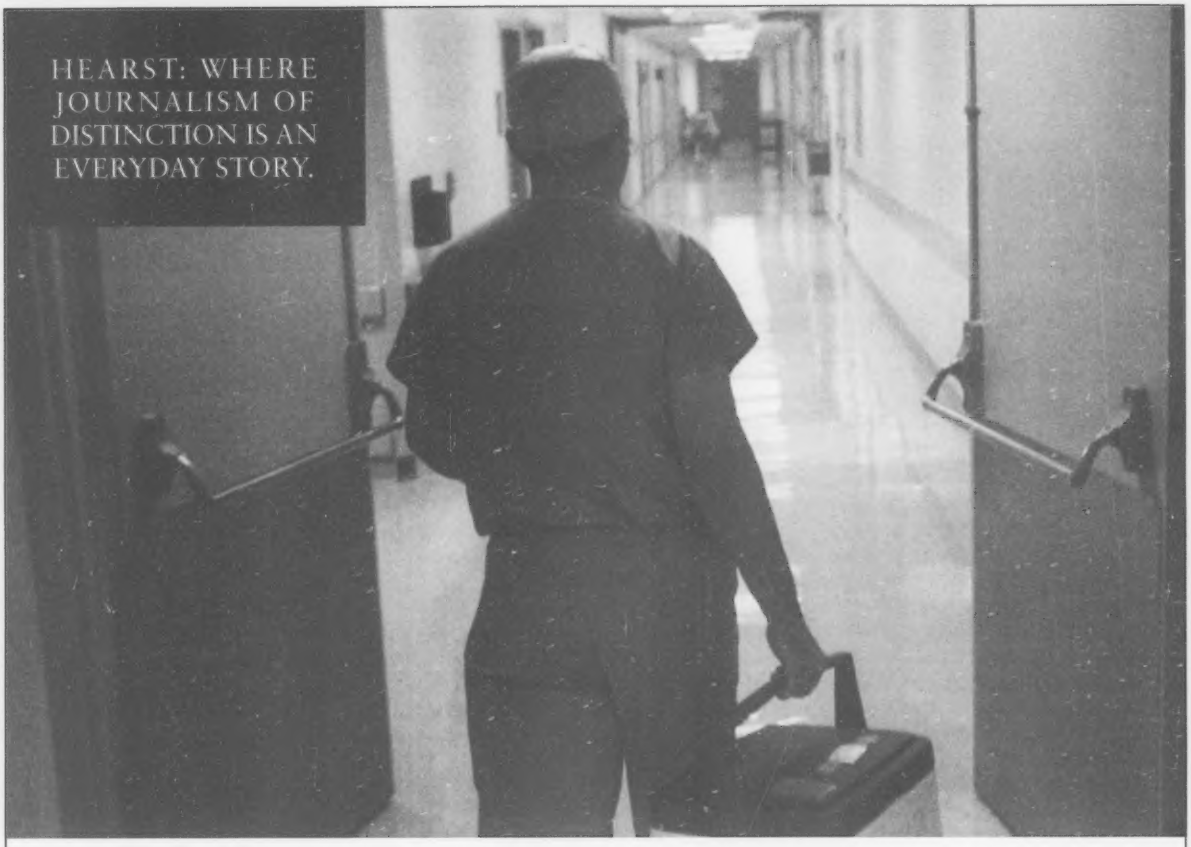
Berendt says he formed negative opinions about district attorney Spencer Lawton, who prosecuted Williams through all four trials, from extensive research. This included interviewing witnesses and jurors, watching the last two trials, and reading transcripts of the first two. A "pattern of deception" by Lawton emerged, he says, that led to the critical portrayal. He notes that Lawton would not talk to him about the case. (Lawton says he wouldn't talk while the case was pending, and that later it became clear to him that Berendt was aligned with Williams).

Insinuations of prosecutorial misconduct shadow Lawton in *Midnight*. In reconstructed dialogue from the first trial, which the author did not attend, Berendt has an unnamed "courthouse regular" saying that Lawton is "trying to keep stuff away from the defense at all costs."

Lawton thinks that's unfair, and that the voluminous public record of the eight-year case shows an honorable prosecution. As evidence he's put together a six-page fact sheet, complete with footnotes to court documents. For example, the book suggests that Lawton deliberately withheld evidence from the defense team in Williams's first two trials. Indeed, Berendt accurately reports that the Georgia Supreme Court, using strong wording aimed at prosecutors, overturned Williams's first conviction over a police report that defense attorneys accused Lawton of withholding. But the author missed a subsequent ruling by the high court that concluded Lawton's actions had not been intentional.

Midnight mistakenly reports that in the first trial, defense attorneys could not respond to a "startling allegation" in Lawton's closing argument because the defense attorney had already given his closing. But, as the transcripts show, he hadn't. Reporter Jan Skutch, who covered the Williams case from start to finish for the *Savannah Morning News*, is one who thinks Lawton is treated unfairly, especially on the charge of withholding evidence. "A great deal of that book is bullshit," he says. "The book makes [Lawton] look like a chiseler. It was not at all that way."

While they didn't hurt sales, questions about *Midnight*'s accuracy may have been costly to the author in another way. After Pulitzer Prize jurors picked it as a finalist for the 1995 award in nonfiction, questions about its accuracy were raised, and they were serious enough that *Midnight* was bypassed by the Pulitzer board. "There's some fabrication in it," says John Carroll, editor of the Baltimore *Sun* and a Pulitzer board member at the time. "While I'm not hung up by a liberal interpretation of events, as a journalist I'm not prepared to call it nonfiction." ◆



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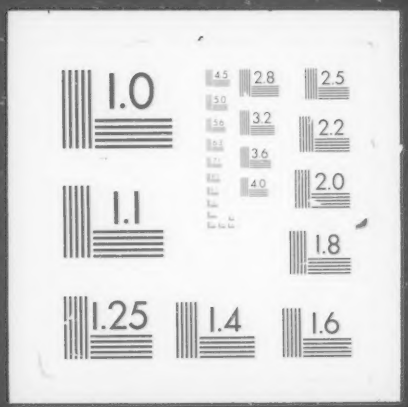
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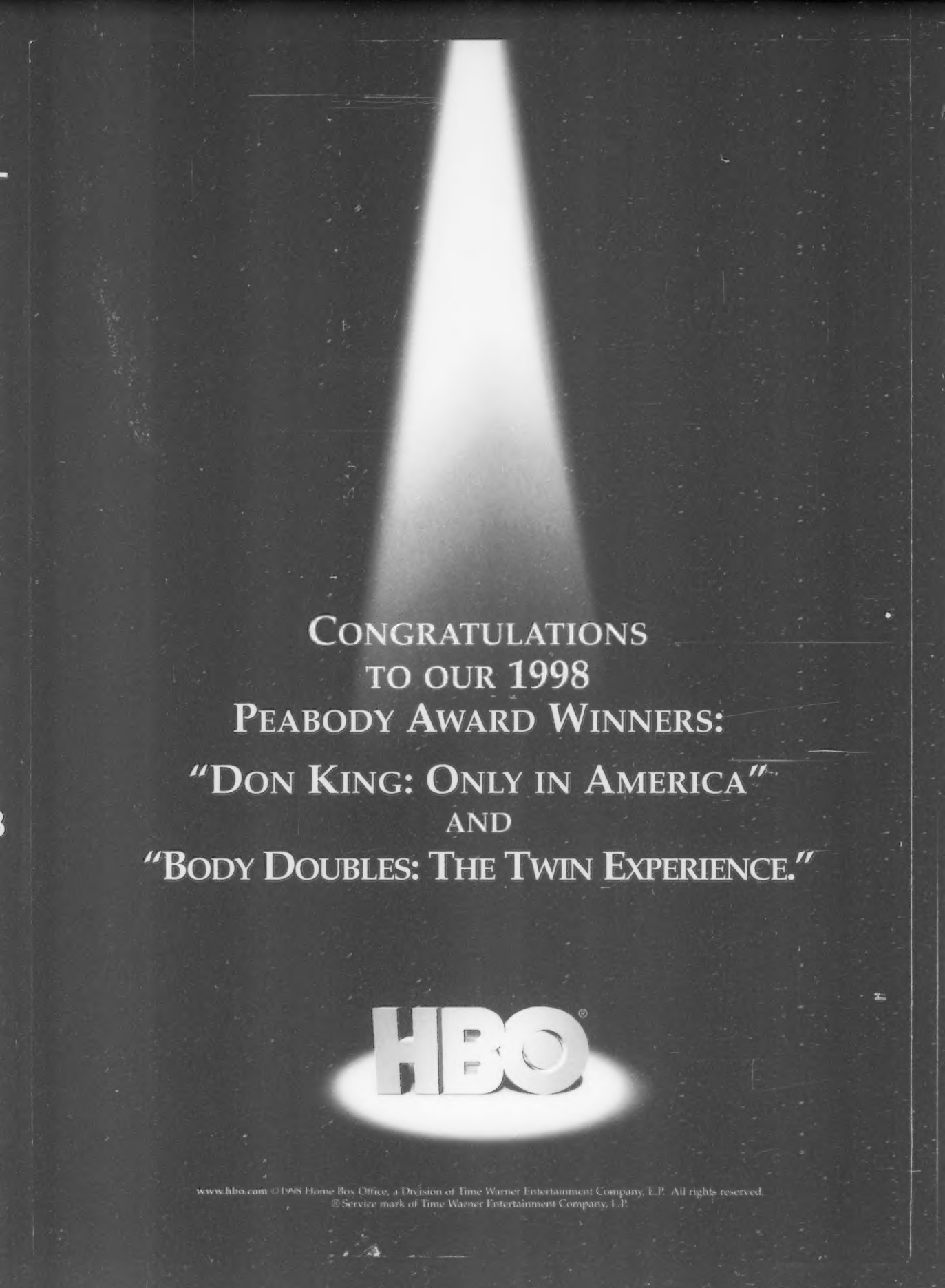
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